# TRANSLATIVE CARNIVALISM:
# PERFORMANCE AND LANGUAGE IN THE CARIBBEAN TEXT

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Kavita Ashana Singh

August 2014

# TRANSLATIVE CARNIVALISM:
# PERFORMANCE AND LANGUAGE IN THE CARIBBEAN TEXT

Kavita Ashana Singh, Ph.D.

Cornell University 2014

This dissertation identifies two dominant modes of postcolonial Caribbean expression: performance and multilingualism. I propose that a relational logic underlies the region's literature and popular culture, where the persistence of coloniality coincides with the new practice of autonomy, whether purely cultural autonomy or also political. Performance layers the desires and impulses for self-expression and self-determination upon the continuing impositions and complicities of the (neo)colonial order, while multilingualism *translatively* enacts a similar negotiation between standardized European languages and local Creoles, metropolitan or global standards and Caribbean cognitive and expressive logics. Within this doubling of selves and of ways of being, acting, and creating, *exhibition,* understood through Carnival masquerade, makes a specifically Caribbean exceptionality conspicuous. Drawing on translation theorist Naoki Sakai's concept of the "heterolingual address," departing from Homi Bhabha's now classic postcolonial theory of "hybridity," and revising Antonio Benitez-Rojo's post-modern understanding of Caribbean performance, I present distinct moments and sites of postcolonial Caribbean expression where the mode and framework for both political action and creative expression emerge as translative performance, and achieve, in the process, an exhibitive visibility of the national or local.

In the chapter on Derek Walcott's *Drums and Colours*, I use Arendtian "action" to describe this speaking and acting before others in the moment of independence, a multilingual experiment in community against a vulnerable plurality. In Monchoachi's post-*départementalisation* exhibition of Creole philosophical value through vehicular French, the postcolonial logic of alienation serves to initiate "freedom" and "ecstasy," the "looseness" of excess produced in the relation between "word" and "body." Maryse Condé's autobiographical performance of an untraditional self that does not speak Creole overtly troubles categories of "truth" in order to expose how marginalities are engendered in a valorization of *créolité* as the only authentic writing. Finally, an exploration of Carnival texts and archives, both in the present and in previous centuries, demonstrates how the new Trinbagonian nation-state struggles to reconcile liberal political ideals and contradictory local practices—a duality that recalls Peter Wilson's "crab antics," between reputation and respectability.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kavita Ashana Singh locates her transnational Caribbean roots in Guyana, Trinidad, and the USA. She completed her A.B. in Comparative Literature with a Certificate in African-American Studies at Princeton University in 2004. She also holds a Maîtrise in Comparative Literature from l'Université de Paris 8.

For Donovan and Ian, my dark knight and my superman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have many to thank, as many have made it possible for this dissertation to finally reach fruition. I begin with my family, for their unconditional love, support, and truth. My advisor, Natalie Melas, was an intellectual inspiration and model since my first days of graduate school, and an ally always thereafter. I am as grateful for your unequaled and rigorous critical guidance, as for your encouragement, faith in my unconventional methods and questions, and seemingly infinite patience. Viranjini Munasinghe, so generous and nurturing, accompanied me as I explored experiences and ideas that were not only academically exciting, but also intimately troubling. I am grateful every time you listen to my sometimes inconvenient observations and conclusions. Gerard Aching, you take my work seriously in a way that sometimes reminds me that I can too, all while your engagements always indicate how I can go further, deeper. Carole Boyce Davies, thank you for always helping me stay focused, for your ready support, and for bridging the roles of compatriot and mentor. And finally, the first person to join my very large dissertation committee in spirit, Tiphaine Samoyault, who was also the first, even before I could, to believe that I had something of my own to say, and who always reminds me to say it. Between these five mentors, I was able to imagine myself in communion with my own translative Caribbean even in the seeming wilderness of six difficult Ithaca winters.

For being my Ithacan family from day one, I thank Caroline Ferraris-Besso, Milan Allan, Juan Sierra, and Guillaume Ratel. Hanh Nguyen, Amaya Atucha, and John Phan, you completed the clan and are now my extended family, however far we all may travel. Desmond Jagmohan, you brought home back to me. Beth Bouloukos

and Marcela Romero, you are as loyal as you are beautiful. Tyi McCray, you've sneakily become one of the most important people I've left behind in Ithaca.

Natalie Leger and Armando García, your gifts to me are unquantifiable, for you have been not only my most trusted friends, but also my first true colleagues—the kind I can tell anything to and learn everything from.

My nephews, Donovan and Ian Singh, gave meaning to my most challenging times as a graduate student. My companion, Rodrigo Hasbún, is the pillar that saw me through to the end.

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| | |
|---|---|
| Biographical Sketch | v |
| Dedication | vi |
| Acknowledgments | vii |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: *Drums and Colours*: Walcott's Multilingual Community | 40 |
| CHAPTER 2: "We Country": Monchoachi's Poetics of Land and Language | 85 |
| CHAPTER 3: "On écrit d'abord pour soi": The Autobiographical Masquerade of Maryse Condé | 140 |
| CHAPTER 4: Rewriting the National Story: Respectability and the "Carnival Mentality" | 194 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 281 |

# INTRODUCTION

"Specks of Dust" said Generale de Gaulle. "Miniature state" was Eric Williams' evaluation. "Small countries" said Edouard Glissant. These quotes describe either one or more Caribbean country, attesting to both physical size and a diminutive global status, asserted both from afar (de Gaulle) and at home (Williams and Glissant) They echo the diminishment that centuries of colonization have enacted on the Caribbean people and present one of greatest difficulties of the postcolonial condition in the region: when colonization ends, how does a new, "miniature" country of alienated citizens and wasted resources begin to define and represent itself?

Surprisingly, seemingly unaware that they are supposed to be irrelevant, people across the Caribbean have creatively shown just the opposite: writers, speakers, actors, thinkers, and all categories of creators have produced representations of themselves that are not only successful, from music to food to sports to writing, but that have also been spectacularly extraordinary enough for international visibility and recognition. Colonial history has bequeathed to the Caribbean a legacy of diminished means, yet its citizens work as if under great expectations.

Postcolonial Caribbean writing has often engaged this doubled ontology, engaging the region's history of belittlement all while creating so prodigiously as to multiply illustrations of its immanence and its value. Both examples and agents of this seemingly incongruous grandeur, those creating in the Caribbean appear to work under a conviction of either individual or local exceptionality, countering the centuries of repression and delegitimization imposed by their colonial history.

**Defining the Postcolonial Condition**

The difficulty of the postcolonial condition for the region, however, does not disappear. After living under the cultural and civic standards imposed by Europe during centuries, after being separated from their own denigrated cultural and creative practices and taught that racially and ethnically they were undeserving, the diasporic citizens of the Caribbean still struggle with the problem of alienation, the concept argued by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks,* through which they turn the colonizer's gaze upon themselves and work towards external standards. With this psychological burden, they must now also solve the urgent political problem of self-determination.

After centuries of colonial *thingification*, Aimé Césaire's term for the reduction of colonized people irrelevance as objects, "instruments of production," these countries still have to define their own self-determination.[1] Islands of the British West Indies first achieved independence as a Federation in 1958, which later fractured into separate countries in 1962, some of which remain territories of England.[2] The French Caribbean countries of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana underwent a *départementalization* process which absorbed them into the French state. Stripped of ancestral political and expressive forms, and displaced from the contexts in which those forms were practiced, these Francophone and Anglophone countries arrived at postcolonial status in a world dominated by very particualar governmental structures created and championed by the very colonial powers they had escaped: the liberal

[1] Aimé Césaire discusses "thingification" 'chosification' in his *Discours sur le colonialism* (*Discourse*
[2] The Federation consisted of the following territories: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Cayman Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

democracies of Europe. Although some have attempted veering away from these models, they were eventually imposed upon those who did not choose it.[3] Thus the newly independent British nation-states adopted Parliamentary systems; the French Caribbean countries were given representation in the former colonizer's preexisting legislative system, where Caribbean concerns had little relevance, and in which they had a token and largely powerless participation. That these governmental structures and philosophies were inappropriate to the specific historic, social, and cultural conditions of the Caribbean countries, their people, and their particular social and cultural practices, and that they were founded in European cultural and ethnic values replete with the hierarchical and racist ideologies that had been used to justify colonization in the Caribbean, did not make them easier to reject. In various ways, liberal democratic status was pre-requisite to participation in the global community, while alternative systems of formal governance were either unavailable or unacceptable within the globalizing, Western world.

Despite these forbidding circumstances, I argue that the democracies of the Caribbean and the creative expression of its people do not simply reproduce Europe. They function, instead, in accordance with their peoples, their histories, and their experiences, in unofficial modes that reflect both the condition of alienation experienced collectively through colonization, and the desire for recognition expressed in the postcolonial moment of (at least) cultural (and perhaps) political autonomy, a

[3] Prominent examples of Caribbean nations who attempted a socialist or communist system of government and were repressed by either the U.S., England, or both, include Guyana, Grenada, and of course, the still communist Cuba.

desire for recognition that is unexpectedly of a kind with the neoliberal, individualist ethos of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

As the era of independences and *départementalization* progressed, after the monoculture plantation economies that Europe had created across the region had been abandoned, what was left was a mix of largely diasporic peoples with far-reaching roots, as well as small (or in some cases, such as Dominica or Guyana, larger) pockets of surviving indigenous communities. Nationalist projects have thus largely focused on devising a sense of national unity out of such diverse and often divided populations; a significant part of the work of either governing or representing the Caribbean has been the work of national identity creation. Theorizing local specificity became an imperative for building the kind of national-cultural model that had become the international norm—this model would bring recognition and validation as distinctive cultural or political entities. Thus, formulations of what can be representative of these Caribbean countries abound. Through Creolization, elaborated by E.K. Brathwaite (*Creole Society*; *Contradictory Omens*) and the French Caribbean *Créolistes* (*Éloge de la créolité*); Pluralism, a theory championed by M.G. Smith (*Plural Society*), a Feedback Machine, an invention of writer Antonio Benitez-Rojo (*Repeating Island*), and broader postcolonial concepts of Hybridity, Mimicry, and Cosmopolitanism (Bhabha), thinkers across disciplines have attempted to theorize and label the region. In most cases, their ideas have been focused on defining the diversity and cross-pollination of the Caribbean people and their cultures.

But, in the focus on conceptualizing Caribbean multiculturalism, its diasporas, its exilic vocation, and its ethnic, racial and cultural identity, in this multiplication of

discourses meant to "define" the Caribbean, there has been very limited examination of postcolonial Caribbean *political* forms. However, as Independence brings new freedom in relation to creation and self-definition, Caribbean expression requires an exploration of how its people might already negotiate and claim autonomy, in ways that preceded twentieth century decolonization. What form does Caribbean expression take as political status changes and official forms of autonomy become available? How do people negotiate social practices that originated in colonial hierarchy, repression, and rebellion, while now using the democratic model of governance they inherited from the same nations that enacted said repression? What can they do with the ideals of self-determination that are inherited from a former master, ideals which were concurrent with their own enslavement, dispossession, and exploitation? How do the formerly enslaved, dispossessed, and exploited really achieve expressive and political autonomy given the limits of their possibilities and their power?

I propose that performance and multilingualism, two modes of expression that recur through Caribbean expression, offer the logics through which Caribbean countries have negotiated political practice and cultural expression historically. Wearing the masks of contemporary nationhood, of modern liberal democracy, or even aspiring genuinely towards those entrenched and inherited European ideals, various Caribbean peoples act within a kind of praxis that has to do with well-worn habits of survival, resistance, and self-actualization, and which echo as well the seminal postcolonial concepts of mimicry and alienation. In maneuvers that reprise the translativeness of the multilingualism that is inherent in the Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean, performance becomes a mode through which Caribbean

peoples act between systems of knowing and meaning, enacting self-determination in complex ways that both reproduce and also exceed recognized modes of self-governance. Their choices translate between the desires and intentions for global legitimacy and recognition, and the practice and exhibition of local norms and needs.

**Erupting into the World**

Edouard Glissant, wondering why there was a stagnation of writing in the French Lesser Antilles in the late twentieth century, writes in *Discours Antillais* that, "si un peuple ne s'exprime pas, c'est qu'il n'est pas libre de le faire" ("if a people does not express itself, it is because it is not free to do so"; 544). Glissant directly connects the act of self-expression to the experience of freedom, in this case discussing the autonomy of his native Martinique, or its lack thereof. Glissant sees this self-definition as necessary to international validity and visibility, but even more, to continued existence: "Il n'est pas de peuple qui au monde moderne ne soit sommé d'exister en nation, à faute de disparaître comme collectivité. L'obligation contemporaine de se connaître et d'assumer la conscience de soi précipite chaque communauté dans une telle "nationalité"" ("There is no people in the modern world that is not summoned to exist as a nation, or else to disappear as a collectivity. The contemporary obligation to know the self and to take responsibility for self-consciousness precipitates each community into a type of "nationality""; 542). Speaking in advocacy of an independent Martinique that might be able to develop, for itself, its "sense of itself," Glissant considers this a global prerequisite of modernity: "Le monde la sommerait aussitôt de se nommer, ou de s'éteindre" ("The world would

summon it to name itself, or to be extinguished"; 542). But other than the need to avoid "extinction," already a very real threat to the "pays 'constitués'" 'constituted countries' (which are also the "small countries") of the Caribbean, Glissant sees the value of this self-representing writing as the possibility to participate in a "rendez-vous des peuples qui ont fait irruption sur la grande scène du monde… l'expression la plus achevée d'une collectivité tient d'abord à son acte-dans-le-monde" ("a meeting of peoples that have erupted upon the great stage of the world… the most advanced expression of a collectivity is tied first and foremost to its act-in-the-world"; 542-3). Erupting on the world stage, expressing itself always in consciousness of its "act in the world," designates a kind of expression that, more than simply self-knowing, is focused on *showing* the self, of exhibitively turning that expression into a means for acquiring a recognition and visibility.

Martinicans do (and largely through inspiration from the Glissant text cited) define themselves culturally, through writing and even without political autonomy; indeed, they define itself in ways appropriate to the ongoing duality of the Martinican condition as still French but now postcolonial.[4] The second chapter of this dissertation will focus on one of these Martinican writers, the poet Monchoachi. That relational duality in any act of self-definition, however, is visible throughout the postcolonial Caribbean which, to varying degrees, continues to negotiate its independence from powerful cultural powers, past and present.

[4] The most prominent example of these is the Créolistes, (formally the writers of the *Éloge de la créolité*) whose *créolité* movement decisively changed the Martinican perspective on self-definition towards a more organic, local literary production. I will be engaging with their ideas at various points in this dissertation, most directly in the second and third chapters.

I thus propose, following Glissant's figure of eruption onto the world stage, that performance, and more specifically exhibition, has been a necessary and defining mode for Caribbean expression, in particular as it imagines and practices versions of autonomy, whether cultural or political. In literature as well as popular culture, expression has had to come to terms with concurrent conflictual modes of being, thanks not only to histories of colonial alienation but also to the systemic global inequalities of the neoliberal, capitalist present. Performance has allowed the postcolonial Caribbean to both be part of liberal democracies and still be diasporic, formerly colonized peoples, with a habit of creativity and rebellion. And performance also helps negotiate between a historical alienation and contemporary sovereignty, making possible a practice of autonomy that carries, also, persistent and complex forms of subordination (involuntarily or in full consciousness).

What I want to focus on is how the particularly postcolonial brand of multiplicity, that which comes with liberation, has been formed by its colonial history, as well as its history of enslavement in which freedom of expression was as unavailable as the freedom to act according to one's will. How do methods of negotiating between imposed behavior and the specificities of individual desire during times of subjugation later shape expressive modes after freedom, and then self-determination, become available?[5] More interestingly, can the modes used in the limited acts of autonomy devised under colonial domination prove effective for

[5] The freedom I describe here refers most explicitly to emancipation from slavery, but can also describe (without creating an equivalence) the end of the indentureship system through which various other populations (East Indians, Chinese, and Portuguese, among others) were brought to the Caribbean and other parts of the Americas to work in conditions that echoed slavery and that severely impeded the possibility of self-actualization of those involved.

dealing with the still restricted, if no longer colonial, possibilities of postcolonial autonomy? That is, international pressures that respond to the needs of global capital create unavoidable political and economic demands on these newly independent nations. These pressures are tangible, as can be seen in the ongoing threat (frequently realized) of military intervention serving American imperial interests should these Caribbean countries not meet their expectation through governmental forms and social practices.[6] Caribbean countries remain caught in a neo-colonial struggle to please, pacify, imitate, and sometimes, obey its neighbors and the greater "community of nations," all while they are trying to fully enjoy their new condition of self-determination, the possibility of crafting their own narratives of becoming, and of achieving recognition as valid, modern, and unique societies in the world. It is in their translative negotiation of the imposed and of the desired forms of being, acting, and creating that I locate the value of performance as an expressive mode for the postcolonial Caribbean.

Returning to Glissant, I take seriously the claim that written expression is essential to defining national identity and claiming autonomy, but within that, I would like to focus on the importance of language(s) in cultural definition. I thus argue that the multilingual negotiation between creoles, vernaculars, and standard European languages, which is essential to Caribbean written *and* oral expression, becomes as important a performance of the cultural self as the musical, visual, or theatrical cultural forms that are frequently taken to represent the Caribbean. Multiplying the

[6] The U.S. has intervened in or occupied Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, and Guyana, usually to further its own economic or political interests, but with the excuse that their political or economic help was needed.

traditions, histories, and ideologies to which one might lay claim, multilingual expression offers a mode through which colonial pasts and hybrid presents are negotiated, through which multiple selves are performed. The claim of this dissertation is thus that Caribbean countries and its people negotiate the historical, political, and social contradictions of the postcolonial moment through a political and creative mode of performance, and that this performative negotiation finds exemplary form in multilingual expression, which in turn offers a cognitive mode for understanding these performative negotiations as *translative*.

**Exhibition**

Performance and multilingualism are valuable modes for understanding not only the aesthetic, but also the political situation of postcolonial Caribbean countries. It allows for being and acting according to two sets of practices, with distinct but intersecting desires (for survival as a nation but also for recognition) coexisting in how they act out their autonomy in the contemporary world. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I will demonstrate, through invocation of Hannah Arendt's theory of Action, how performance and political action can be intrinsic to each other. In the meantime, I would like to propose a third term: in the performance that both emulates international standards and expresses local needs, the heightened visibility with which the latter appears, in its conspicuous difference from the homogeneous standard, verges beyond performance to a kind of *exhibition*, that performance that gives the non-normative aspects of expression greater visibility. Through exhibition, while being both

standardized and in excess of the standard, the Caribbean has found the means to counteract its curse of "small" size and international irrelevance.

I call this excess of the norm *exhibitive* because it carries the critical possibilities of performance as I have described it, even while it goes further than performance, which I understand as a new commonplace of postcolonial expression. Artistic work in and about the region has been able to entertain the vulnerability and also giddiness of ill-fitting parts, of inappropriate roles, of oversized ambitions. The exhibitive in the Caribbean is how performance shows its excess, which becomes its exceptionality, an exuberant specificity that interrupts and creates a spectacle as it transcends standards and norms. The exhibitive does not just become visible in relation to the norm, it actually demands to be seen. Performance here thus means both the exhibitive and the relation it initiates. It is the attention to both the self that is acting, and the audience as central agents in acknowledging the expressive act. It works through its postcolonial condition of hybridity, its history of violence, alienation, and resistance, in order to address both the need to produce a nation (whether politically independent, or sovereign only in cultural terms), and the desire to make that nation a recognized and legitimate player on the world stage by meeting and transcending external, historical, and hierarchical norms. Simultaneously, it is the only means through which small nations can aspire to visibility and relevance within a world of deep power inequalities.

**"What is Performance?" 'Look meh' Exhibition**

In his classic essay "What is Performance?" Marvin Carlson offers two basic definitions of the term. He explains that performance is either the playing of a role that marks a distance from the self (in other words, acting), or it is about achievement, displaying a skill, or talent, as with someone who has "performed well" at work and received recognition for it. Carlson eventually concludes that most performance lies somewhere between these two common meanings. But I am interested in how performance means in the Caribbean itself; Carnival, broadly practiced in the region, is central to my understanding of Caribbean performativity and, in particular, of the exhibitive, both as a mode of self-expression in the global sense, and as a means for acquiring social capital locally, of affirming national sentiment while exhibiting modernity to a transnational audience. A complex and always changing range of cultural practices, the Carnival event has best exemplified the "look meh" paradigm that I take as fundamental to understanding Caribbean expression. In Trinidad, it is common to hear that they have a "look meh culture" where "look meh" describes action that incorporates a demand to be seen: brilliant or revealing costumes, excessive or "vulgar" dancing, loud or provocative music. Having observed within Carnival the ubiquity of exhibition, I seek primarily to show how this exhibitive "look meh" logic resides in the work of various Caribbean writers, and is exemplified in how they engage, within the literary medium, the multilingualism that marks their cultural and social contexts.

While my research on Carnival in the fourth chapter of the dissertation has focused on Trinidad, similar notions to the "look meh" self-exhibition can be found

elsewhere—my reflections on "performance" begin with the Guyanese Creole word "pruhform" that I hear in my own family. In this specific word, which visibly and audibly transforms standardized notions of performance, there lies a concept of (self) exhibition that incorporates recognition into the act of "showing-off": "Look how them a pruhform!" one might say about a neighborhood rival, someone perceived as acting exaggeratedly in exhibition of what they have, what they look like, what they can do, who they're with, or other attribute that they feel proud of. One might also say that a playful child, while the center of attention of the adults around him, "a pruhform" ("is pruhforming"), because the child is acting out what he's learned or what he can do in direct invocation of admiration and love from his audience. Both the person who "pruhforms" or the person who projects a "look meh" attitude are directly asking for validation of his accomplishments, and recognition for excelling, even while that desire for recognition is paradoxically accompanied by an already deeply felt conviction in the value of the self and one's performance—whether it be performance of manners, of physical appearance, of language, or of wealth. Combining Carlson's two poles of performance, these terms indicate that the actor is putting her skills on display, seeking recognition from an external observer or audience, while playing a part that she perceives as ideal and thus distinct from the self. In a broader communal sense, the "look meh" performance of globally visible cultural products, such as Carnival, wants the community in question to be seen, recognized, and valued on the world stage, quite like Glissant's "act-in-the-world." This cannot be simply reduced to a colonial alienation, because to "pruhform," even in seeking external recognition, is also to assert specificity as a) meeting colonial cum

global standards for legitimation as modern, democratic, and self-sufficient and b) going beyond these civilizational standards to claim exceptionality. Even while yielding to the standardized notions of democratic legitimacy—at turns liberal, at turns neo-liberal—the performance that comes out of this Caribbean shows more: it proudly exhibits specificities that, even if visible, cannot be easily uncoded.

**Performativity**

Given the importance of "self-consciousness" in the project of defining a Caribbean self-expression and national status, Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity is useful for thinking the dynamics of national identity construction when the politics of self-representation must negotiate controlled and normative categories of identity. Of especial value in Butler's concept is the way that her performativity applies to all acts of identity—not just subversive, non-normative, or even subaltern ones—suggesting that no external act of self-definition will express more than others some internal "truth." Here, we want to retain an awareness of the entrenched hierarchies that determine Caribbean acts of self-definition and self-expression, such that performance of the Caribbean specificity, part of an unequal commerce of identities, is conditioned by its relations with dominant social, cultural, and political norms. Each of the writers I study in this dissertation, in the performances they enact, stage clearly the negotiation with the dominant standards within which they attempt to articulate a form of autonomy. Carnival expression, "written" and performed by many, does the same.

When the enactment of autonomy does not remain limited to a normative form—such as governmental systems inherited from Europe—but goes beyond it, I

understand this as the exhibitive rather than the more generalized performative. In Butler's writing, a similar subversion can be located in the figure of drag, for in its overt performativity, it makes visible the "imitative structure" of even the norm: "It is a production which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities" (175-176). The performances that I am interested in, like drag, reveal an excess that belies the norm. Their exhibitive expression, blatant in how it asserts a specific self *within* the normative expression, makes it possible to theorize postcolonial autonomy differently, by considering the ways that, even in performing European forms of government that have become the imperative, that performativity incorporates a constant "resignification and recontextualization" such that the historical and social specificities of the place can be called upon to travesty *and* accompany standard modes of modern autonomy. In addition to revealing the performativity of the norm as per Butler's drag, however, this performance tips over into exhibition when the focus is briefly placed on that non-normative excess whose value is being asserted.

**What is Performance, Usually**

Performance in the Caribbean is frequently understood through the cultural content of social practices, "performances that take shape beyond the sphere of the individual, in the overlapping forms of theatre, ritual, historical re-enactment, carnival, and dance, among others" (Adams 6). Or, it has been used to re-theorize very similar notions to

creolization, plurality, or transformation, the concepts commonly used to theorize the particular mixedness of the Caribbean's diasporic peoples and cultures:

> Performance offers one of the most powerful critical vocabularies for understanding cultural contact… the concept of performance speaks simultaneously to continuity and contingency—to ways in which embodied practices are reiterated even as they evolve, changing sometimes significantly…. In the absence of written histories, as well as in their presence, the past travels through bodies, the body itself is a site of documentation and remembrance. (7)

In the volume of critical essays on Caribbean performance that I have cited above, *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South*, the focus is on performative expression through embodied cultural practices that come from ancestral traditions and that have been retained, are being renewed, or will be commemorated in the Caribbean. However, although cultural practice as tradition, inheritance, and as a means to empowerment and remembrance figure significantly in my analyses here, what I seek to identify is the means through which the very logic of performance—as expression that incorporates the means to radical self-determination by acting out a desired self—functions within the decolonial or postcolonial project of constructing autonomy. More than the cultural content upon which to build a rigorous theory of national specificity, performance as I conceive it here offers a *mode* of post-independence expression because it describes how various countries negotiate the legacies of their colonial history.

Performance as creative form has been readily attributed to the Caribbean, in ways that collapse the region's expression into racialized essences (such as rhythm, color, music, bodily capacities and musical tendencies). These criteria, of course, are understood as intuitive rather than rational, and echo the reason-emotion divide that was used and is still used to justify colonial and neocolonial racial hierarchies and stereotypes. Under this logic, what might indeed be a preponderance of performative arts in the region is reduced to the symbolic, ahistorical, and analytically unavailable. For this reason it bears pointing out that in my understanding of performance as a mode of expression, its prevalence is directly related to its particular value for the repressed and formerly repressed, the diasporic and migratory, and the colonized and decolonized, and it is a mode that incorporates this ongoing duality, this characteristic translativity of the condition of being simultaneously autonomous and formerly colonized. The assumption that there can be a performative essence, however, must be carefully examined when it appears even in postcolonial discourse, especially if it represents the Caribbean and its peoples as reductive and static. It is such a danger that I identify in the treatment of performance by Antonio Benitez-Rojo in his seminal text, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*.

**Benitez-Rojo and Caribbean Performance**

Benitez-Rojo's post-modern exploration of a trans-Caribbean specificity articulates performance through an emphasis on cultural multiplicity and the confluence of diverse elements of worldly religious, linguistic, and aesthetic practice. *The Repeating Island,* a prominent and privileged source for notions of "Caribbeanness,"

immediately selects performance as the fundamental and defining aspect of Caribbean cultural practice. For Benitez-Rojo, Caribbean people and Caribbean spaces, whether Francophone, Anglophone, Hispanophone, or other, exist always in a performative "way," obliquely described as musical, rhythmic, and sensual, all of which is theorized through the productive disorder of chaos. In *The Repeating Island*, the Caribbean and performance are made irrevocably linked:

> How can we describe the culture of the Caribbean?… Nobody has to rack his brains to come up with an answer; it's in the public domain. If I were to have to put it in one word I would say: performance. But performance not only in terms of scenic interpretation but also in terms of the execution of a ritual, that is, that "certain way" in which the two Negro women who conjured away the apocalypse were walking. In this "certain kind of way" there is expressed the mystic or magical (if you like) load of the civilizations that contributed to the formation of Caribbean culture. (11)

This is an astute and important observation to make: for the Caribbean people, there is something particularly appropriate (and prevalent) about performance for describing its expression. Like the authors of *Just Below South*, who understand performance through cultural remembrance, Benitez-Rojo is attune to a certain cultural content that emerges from the multiplicitous inheritances that meet syncretically in the Caribbean; he theorizes performance as being able to "neutralize" the violent circumstances of colonization and slavery that was at the origin of Caribbean community. Benitez-Rojo's assertion that performance describes the Caribbean treats it as a widely held

belief, "in the public domain." However, I differ from Benitez-Rojo and others on the idea that it is the content—whether multiplicitous, syncretic, or hybrid—of Caribbean performance that begs analysis, and am interested in understanding instead the *mode* of performance and the various logics it might follow. Benitez-Rojo dedicates his text not to understanding the claim "the Caribbean can be described by performance," but rather to observing it as a given, and lending intention and evidence to it. Adding modifiers "mystic and magical" to this perspective reinforces their relatedness by taking it beyond the explicable, and also beyond the critique and probes of reason. This assertion also relies on a multiplicity of primordial essences, the "load of civilizations," that presumably contribute their share to Caribbeanness.[7] Echoing Edouard Glissant's argument that the plantation is the site of socio-economic and cultural genesis in the Caribbean (*Caribbean Discourse*), Benitez-Rojo bases his theorization of the Caribbean archipelago on the the region's common past of plantation-based slavery. Out of this colonial social construct, the mixing, cross-fertilization, diversity and cosmopolitanism of the various constitutive peoples of the Caribbean, in short, the content of Caribbean culture, is what he understands as producing a cultural logic:

> The literature of the Caribbean seeks to differentiate itself from the European not by excluding cultural components that influenced its formation, but rather, on the contrary, by moving toward the creation of an ethnologically promiscuous text that might allow a reading of the

[7] Even if Benitez-Rojo describes the Caribbean as syncretic culturally and otherwise, this mestizo ontology replaces diasporic racial and cultural classifications to create a new primordial ideation locatable only in the Caribbean.

> varied and dense polyphony of Caribbean society's characteristic codes. (189)

The concatenation of these various forces and its promiscuity into a "varied and dense polyphony," a syncretic newness, produces the performative energy that Benitez-Rojo identifies as Caribbean. Even while he might generalize it into a primordial cultural practice with a broad range of origins, Benitez-Rojo's "performance" is described in a way that renders it organic to Caribbean space, such that the Caribbean becomes the exemplary location for such performance. For this reason, he is able to claim "a geographical fact: that the Antilles are an island bridge connecting, in "another way," North and South America" (2). That "certain way" that we initially encountered with those presumably representative "Negro women" is introduced for the first time as constitutively other, ("an*other* way") and its otherness is understood in relation to the "West" or "Europe." However, besides its mixed content, the "certain way" that designates Benitez-Rojo's performance remains mysteriously undefined.

While Benitez-Rojo's tendency to render the Caribbean exceptional is not unique to him, I evoke his conceptual and definitional strategies because, perhaps in keeping with the idealization of chaos that he privileges in his text, they consistently evade historically, culturally, and socially sustainable content, relying instead on the mystifying strategies that evoke the ineffable—relatable, perhaps exclusively, to the unknowable of literature or art.

Thus, in addition to Benitez-Rojo's frequent recourse to the mystical and magical, attributes rendering their subject analytically unavailable, we also see repeated deflections from more detailed explorations of his own ideas. For instance, he

ends one assertion with: "…which I won't list for reasons of space and argument… I'll content myself by saying that…" (23), a formula that recurs several times. Consistently, Benitez-Rojo precludes the possibility of challenging his examples, his evidence, or his approximations, and much of his reasoning for this can be seen in the following long quote:

> if we were to take the Central American ligament as our connection between continents, the result would be much less fruitful and would not suit the purposes of this book. That connection gains objective importance only on maps concerned with our current situation seen as geography, geopolitics, military strategy, and finance. These are maps of the pragmatic type which we all know and carry within us, and which therefore give us a first reading of the world. The words "a certain way" are the signs of my intention to give meaning to this text as an object of rereading, of a "certain kind of" reading. (4-5)

For Benitez-Rojo, the "certain" way (or certain reading), describable only in what it is *not* and repeating the undefined modifier "a certain" throughout the text, openly precludes specificity, historicity, and critique. It mystifies Caribbean performance so that understanding its emergence and value becomes impossible, banished to some "ancient" truth no longer accessible to us. Meanwhile, he defines the performative through ritual, but in his description of the women who "conjured away Apocalypse," this ritual "way" that carries all the responsibility for "sublimating violence," and that connects with the "rhythms" that continuously interrupt and connect with each other in a chaotic "feedback machine," this ritual becomes constant and quotidian rather than a

periodical or cyclical practice. Ritual is thus continuous and without temporal significance, and it renders the Caribbean space and its people utopic and ahistoric.

While I share the desire for an understanding of the Caribbean that does not limit itself to positivist and scientific, instrumental categories, I'd like to focus on two passages from the introduction to *The Repeating Island* in order to illustrate the dangers of an uncritical surrender to this approach:

> The peoples of the sea, or better, the Peoples of the Sea proliferate incessantly while differentiating themselves from one another, traveling together toward the infinite. Certain dynamics of their culture also repeat and sail through the seas of time without reaching anywhere. If I were to put this in two words, they would be: performance and rhythm. And nonetheless, I would have to add something more: the notion that we have called "in a certain kind of way;" something remote that reproduces itself and that carries the desire to sublimate apocalypse and violence; something obscure that comes from the performance and that one makes his own in a very special way; concretely, it takes away the space that separates the onlooker from the participant. (16)

This paragraph makes explicit certain of the approximations that *The Repeating Island* relies on, so that we see how cultural diversity or "differentiating" is inherent to Benitez-Rojo's notion of repetition, even while that differentiation eventually leads to a new fixed and repeatable norm in its syncretism that cancels distance ("it takes away the space that separates"). The unspecified "something" that is "obscure," is soon rearticulated as "performance and rhythm." These are the core terms of a Caribbean

exceptionalism that is only defined as "a very special way," and only yields "concrete" definition in: "it takes away the space that separates the onlooker from the participant." That is, at the end of its process of repetition, the performative relationship between onlooker and participant is collapsed, and all parties and actions are reduced into an unspecified unity, rejoining the transcendental logic of essences. A similar logic is also apparent in the second long quote below:

> The culture of the Peoples of the Sea is a flux interrupted by rhythms which attempt to silence the noises with which their own social formation interrupts the discourse of Nature. If this definition should seem abstruse, we could simplify it by saying that the cultural discourse of the Peoples of the Sea attempts, through real or symbolic sacrifice, to neutralize violence and to refer society to the transhistorical codes of Nature. Of course, as the codes of Nature are neither limited nor fixed, nor even intelligible, the culture of the Peoples of the Sea expresses the desire to sublimate social violence through referring itself to a space that can only be intuited through the poetic, since it always puts forth an area of chaos. In this paradoxical space, in which one has the illusion of experiencing a totality, there appears to be no repressions or contradictions; there is no desire other than that of maintaining oneself within the limits of this zone for the longest possible time, in free orbit, beyond imprisonment or liberty. (16-17)

This dramatization and generalization of Caribbean action and behavior and ideals reprises the generalization of ritual enacted in the description of the "Negro women,"

where sacred ritual is simply made the mode of functioning for all Caribbean people at all time. There is a continuity and completeness to Caribbean culture, even in its "area of chaos" that is always. His mystical concept of the "Peoples of the Sea," (capitalized paradoxically to fix and totalize their reductively mystical categorization) projects upon the people a depoliticized mode through which "one has *the illusion of* experiencing totality," where "there *appear to be* no repressions or contradictions," and "there *is no desire* other than that of maintaining oneself within the limits of this zone for the longest possible time, in free orbit, beyond imprisonment or liberty" (emphases are mine). It is in the complete evacuation of desire (in particular political desire), and in this simplified opposition between liberty and imprisonment, that we see how Benitez-Rojo's idealization positions the Caribbean people in a non-conflictual condition of stasis, a culturally complex, syncretic, but no longer dynamic, transformative, or *active* social practice. In understanding Caribbean expression, we must still investigate the particular condition of postcoloniality that has not completely eschewed its colonial inheritance, but is operating with a logic of measured complicity in and subscription to the structures of domination—a complicity that allows the performance of a certain form of liberty that is shared by the new imperial powers *and* the formerly dominated little nations. Using Benitez-Rojo's language, we must "take away the space that separates" in order to understand the effectivity of coloniality in postcoloniality, and precisely, to see why this is what makes performance so important to the Caribbean. But rather than syncretized essence, the relationality that replaces separation allows for the exploration of a historical, political, and human condition of being denied recognition but continuing to seek visibility.

Benitez-Rojo's more traditional notion of a mystical and apolitical Caribbean performativity misses the important fact that, even in its poeticity, performance in the Caribbean is thoroughly political and also quite participant in the world. In its active and changing involvement with other nations and greater powers, it is not so easily described in generalizing terms and through essentializing concepts. Through a constantly historicized articulation of a specifically postcolonial Caribbean condition, where exegesis is not evaded through aestheticization but rather functions within both, Caribbean political action and performance can be linked as the dual products of a long history and political status that has made this mode of expression a valuable mode for thinking political action and enacting cultural expression.

**Multilingualism**

Performance, as I use it in this dissertation, is best understood by refracting it through the translative practice of linguistic expression—oral or written—where mixing and doubling vernaculars, linguistic registers, and whole tongues is a quotidian practice for many. In most cases, this takes the form of Creoles, local vernaculars, and standardized European tongues. In many parts of the Caribbean, Creole languages developed—frequently in the context of the plantation—out of the various languages of the various peoples coexisting there. Usually, those Creoles were denigrated languages vis-à-vis the standardized, "civilized" languages of the European colonizer. Although Creoles and these standardized languages, here French and English, exist in a *translative* relationality, with a number of Caribbean people shuttling between the two, I maintain that describing contemporary multilingualism as fluid would efface the

way that language choices and competencies figure in ongoing social hierarchies, how the ability to use one with the right accent, idioms, or expressions can provide access to opportunities, to acceptance within circles of influence and power, or access to categories of authenticity. These powerful competencies and their exclusions, of course, go both ways. It bears emphasizing that while a heterolingual society might be the status quo, movement through all its parts may not be a privilege shared by all.

The reclamation of vernaculars and Creoles have been an important part of postcolonial cultural practice, and literary debates have ultimately reclaimed Creoles, sometimes a "mother tongue" for many Caribbean people, into the realm of cultural and literary legitimacy. Part of that process, I argue, has been the exhibitive use of Creole language, often daringly opaque, in otherwise standardized language texts. Linguistic shifts in literature (and also in popular discourse) are carefully chosen; the ways in which writers might alternate between exhibition and opacity by switching between tongues, or in which they might make opacity exhibitive by creating punctual moments of incomprehension, is as much an aesthetic choice as it is one of representation. The sensual, visual, and interpretative dynamics generated through the many multilingual strategies in Caribbean literature lends itself easily to an interpretation that is other than textual.

The inequalities that multilingual cultural and literary practices incorporate reinforce the value of performance, whether for bridging social groups or for achieving a certain international status, as the logic of political expression. The Caribbean multilingual that concerns us, in addition to testing new modes of literary theorization, also lets us think, through the literary, about non-textual political and

cultural expression in the various contexts represented. The multilingual, which figures the exhibitive maneuvering between local practices (whether Creole language or creole dissent) and imported standards (whether English/French language, democratic liberalism, or neoliberal capitalist consumerism) expresses wonderfully the performative negotiations of popular cultural practices beyond literature, especially through Carnival. The logics of the translative and multilingual, as they stage performance in literary texts from a very specific historical, political geographical context, emerge also as potent terms for thinking non-literary cultural production.

**The Translative**

In my analyses of literary expression, thinking multilingual writing as *translative* has helped me conceptualize the aesthetic, cultural, political, and philosophical stakes of such expression. The translative helps describe, first of all, the relationality between standardized languages and Creole in multilingual expression, a relationality that daily enters social, cultural, educational, and economic negotiations in the Caribbean, even outside of language. My use of "translative," signifies 1) a continuous and active demand that the reader engage not only as a receiver of, but also as a participant in, the experience of meaning creation, and 2) a continuous and active interaction between languages that rarely functions as peaceful, harmonious dialogue but rather marks, again and again, the confrontation with a historically entrenched hierarchy. The monolingualism of the colonial project, all the more sinister for its persistence in a time and space of great linguistic diversity, not only imposed a singular language, but the myth that an epistemology of the singular and unified would by definition be

superior. Thinking the translative, however, opens up the possibility of linguistic power deployed in both directions, of revisions, resistances, strategies of rebellion, and of interventions into the inscription of power. Unlike ideologies of creoleness that reproduce the tyranny of the unified, the translative acknowledges and mobilizes the still fractured spaces of now post-colonial hierarchy. It makes room for thinking autonomy as necessarily vulnerable in these fractious, diverse, and most importantly, not absolutely independent societies.

The suspension of transparent meaning resonates with translation theorist Naoki Sakai, who rejects the idea that communication should be the only goal or expected outcome of language and translation. Sakai troubles the assumption that all members of a community uniformly share language. In his theory of heterolingual address he argues that "every utterance can fail to communicate because heterogeneity is inherent in any medium, linguistic or otherwise. Every translation calls for a counter-translation…. within the framework of communication, translation must be endless." When "heterogeneity is inherent in any medium," hierarchies based in transparency fall apart, and a translative engagement with the possibilities of communicative failure can begin. Within this model, the "incoherences" of performative expression, that which acts according to multiple categories and logics at the same time, and the interruptive exhibitions of cultural specificity can be understood as valuable. While it interrupts uniform expression, transforms an otherwise accessible text into a display of sometimes opaque local specificity, exhibitive expression might result in a productive failure of communication all while it enacts a new mode for troubling transparent linguistic (and cultural) demands.

My use of the term "translative" inevitably points to translation theory, and many aspects of that realm of thought nourish this concept. One important concern in translation studies is the condition of invisibility to which the translator is subject, the effacement of the linguistic multiplicity that is at the origin of the act of translation, and the burial of the process of translation by the monolingual product that is the product of that process. The work of translation implies the power to create meaning, represent difference, and also confronts the limits (and possibilities) of communication in language, but these aspects are made invisible in a final translation of a text. However, by thinking the "translative" as a fundamental aspect of literary analysis, we revalue that process and are also able to highlight the conflictual possibilities and limits of contact between languages, as well as the various non-semantic ways in which meaning can be made through their multiplication

**Performance vs. Hybridity**

How is this understanding of Caribbean self-expression, based in multiplicity and relationality, distinct from the seminal postcolonial concepts of hybridity and colonial mimicry? The difference lies in the sources for hybrid expression that become the object of analysis. I share with Homi Bhabha, the most prominent literary theorist of these concepts, an unwillingness to emphasize overt and explicit intention to rebellion by (formerly) colonized peoples, but I find it important to note that much of his analyses of postcoloniality emerge from analysis of the discourse of colonialism itself, against which "native" resistance expresses itself obliquely and becomes evidence of the colonizer's incoherence, a sign of the failure of colonial cultural authority. When

Bhabha speaks of recognition and of the "resistance" that is inherent in the hybridity produced in a colonized society, the source and agent of production remains the colonizer, what he calls "the productivity of the colonial power" ("Signs" 112).

> [Resistance] is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power - hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth. For colonial domination is achieved through a process of disavowal that denies the chaos of its intervention as Entstellung, its dislocatory presence in order to preserve the authority of its identity in the teleological narratives of historical and political evolutionism. (110-111)

At core, his analysis focuses on colonial power and its effects, and he understands hybridity not as produced by the colonized but by their colonization, as expression that takes its very structure and logic from (in this case British) colonization and the contradiction by which its production of colonial subjects is undermined by the cultural discourses in which it bases its authority. This results in a powerful exposé of the fractured hybridity of colonial authority itself, yet it comes up short in describing postcolonial expression in (semi) autonomous conditions, expression seeking self-definition even in its hybridity. For one, the condition of autonomy result in people experiencing a greater sense of control of their self-definition. Even if or while the formerly colonized imitates European or colonial models, the mimicry of *post*coloniality actually reprises the colonizer's desire for recognition, and at that

moment, the formerly colonized expresses her own authoritative demand to be acknowledged. In this transaction of visibility and recognition the gaze is no longer objectifying and colonial, but created of the formerly colonized's demand: the demand initiated in the mode of *performance*. Now, what Bhabha identified as expression which demonstrates the colonized's "sly civility" is rather less sly or discrete, becoming instead *exhibitive* as it seeks visibility. The postcolonial condition of autonomy, whether limited or complete, political or cultural, allows for the colonized to occupy a space of power and to convert its slyness into a declaration of self-determining autonomy. Secondly, Bhabha's hybridity comes up short in today's expression because the terms of cultural hegemony no longer fit the English imperial model outlined by Bhabha. The "ideological correlatives of the Western sign… that sustain a tradition of English 'cultural' authority" (105)—in other words, the colonial authority—has become but one factor in a larger, discursive rather than symbolic system of global neo-liberal validation.

Bhabha shows the effect of hybridity on English national symbolism, but his concept of hybridity draws little on the cultural production of *post*coloniality, which incorporates the experience of creating under the sign of (limited) self-determination. Bhabha's hybridity thus begins under a similar logic as the complex and multilingual forms of expression that interest me here, but its limits lie in its (colonial) historicity:

> Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of

> authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory—or, in my mixed metaphor, a negative transparency. (112)

Without suggesting that the effects of colonial power reach their limit when colonization formally ends, I hold that we are no longer concerned with "strategies of subversion" when the immanent colonial authority has been evacuated, but instead an assertive transformation of the gaze that shifts the location of its power. We recognize, here, the "revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects." That repetition of the cultural effects of power by the colonized is indeed also part of postcoloniality, through inherited forms of autonomy and through the continuing desire to fit categories that might be recognized globally as "modern" (the new "civilized"). Yet, inherent in that repetition, local specificity emerges both as the symbol of difference as well as, through that difference, a claim to validity. This validity, claimed through a complex and translative specificity (the local specificity that carries power in its multilingualism), leads us further than the logic of hybridity with its metaphor of a "negative transparency," that metaphor which Bhabha

invents to illustrate the poverty of the colonial claim to wholeness of authority. But now, the validation sought is greater than a mere negative reflection of the effects of authority; the specificity upon which it is based rather produces its own logics of authority, acting as an interruption, an invasion of the norms of authority, an excess in the repetition that is too different to be "sly," too assertively visible to be subversive. It creates its own authority by producing its own rules of recognition, such that its very mode of interplay with, diversion from, and symbolic exceeding of the norm becomes the content of a new cultural form. Rather than concern itself with "the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination," in other words, with merely reacting to the colonizer, it wants to exercise its own domination, its own "discrimination" in its assertion of its now powerful difference, its identificatory and validating specificity, even if that specificity still reproduces or imitates either colonial or neo-liberal forms. In a similar but much more confident mode, "It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power."

**Chapter Summaries**

Each of the "texts" explored here offers a distinct aesthetic model of performance for imagining autonomy in Caribbean. Translative carnivalism, as I call it, the capacity to juxtapose, mix, and collide "languages" in such a way that the specificities of the text, of the place (and of the author) is exhibited, gives us the framework for productively exploring the means to visibility and political validity for the formerly colonized, and continues to be the preferred means of self-expression and self-determination. Each of these texts, in its almost inevitable multilingualism, presents diverging ways of

imagining autonomy. I locate performance in each, but the specific situation of each writer, whether through his or her subject position, the linguistic and colonial history of their homeland, and their postcolonial political status as either independent or otherwise, produces each time a unique form of performance. Because of this situatedness, these readings provide, rather than an abstract and all-encompassing theory of translative performance, an introduction to Caribbean performance as a historically and contextually determined mode for exploring distinct forms and techniques of creation. Furthermore, each reading relies on a particular approach to thinking the intersection of the political, the poetic, and the translative. This specifying perspective does not foreclose theorization, as the readings will hopefully show, but allows for comparison across the Caribbean more broadly. It also allows for a careful reprisal of the temporality implied in the "postcolonial," such that the effectiveness of the past (the colonial) in the present (the post) demands a more careful exploration of not only the content, but also the mode of the Caribbean's well-documented multiplicity.

In Chapter 1, "*Drums and Colours*: Walcott's Multilingual Community," the question of autonomy is directly engaged—Walcott's play was written for the Independence celebration of the West Indies Federation, and sought to come to terms with the need for building a functioning state and nation in the aftermath of colonization. This is early in the postcolonial era in the Caribbean, and succeeds only Haiti as an experience of autonomy in the region. Using a Carnival parade to frame the unusually large and rather unweildy play, Walcott gives free reign to the possibility of disorder in this curation of scenes that would retell Caribbean "History." Beginning

and ending the play with a mass movement to "act," whether as Carnival masqueraders or as actors in the traditional drama, the call to self-expression is unavoidable. By drawing on Hannah Arendt's theory of Action, I theorize how the "acting" of Walcott's players, linguistically creole while culturally pluralist, presents a proposition for collectivity that is ideal (while far from utopian) for the disconnected groups that compose the Caribbean islands. Languages in this text, uneven, playful, and multiplying as the drama progresses, enact both the individualist and communal potential of this plural, vulnerable new Caribbean people. In this first moment of autonomy, the form of expressive autonomy that is being performed subtly presents Creole as dialogic, cognitively dynamic and irreducible to the smooth clarity that marks most nationalist mythography.

In the subsequent chapter, ""We Country": Monchoachi's Poetics of Land and Language," the independence mood, with its optimism for national sovereignty and its giddy vulnerability, is not available. Monchoachi, writing from the Martinique of Glissant and the Créolistes, who have themselves had to come to terms with the departmental status that the French Antilles accepted in lieu of independence, is engaged in an anti-colonial discourse that is simultaneously *post*colonial. For Monchoachi, the persistence of a colonial framework determines the shape and limits of Martinican self-determination even today, and his poetic strategies directly engage with postcolonial concepts, like alienation, that still determine Antillean expressoin. In contrast to "Western" colonial legacies, his prose and poetry draw on Creole language in order to reveal a mode of communal existence that contrasts with the anthropocentric, exploitative modes of autonomy that drove European colonization

and remained in its wake. Being Creole, as theorized by Monchoachi, in conjunction with Carib modes of acting and thinking, requires a more equitable way of sharing the land, of imagining self-governance, and of participating in the world—with responsibility, first and foremost towards one's own space in the world, and secondly towards one's community and its geographic space. Thus, Monchoachi's writings function as a performative elaboration of a Creole mode of being that stands in exemplary answer to European presumptions of dominance, and this mode hinges entirely on the Creole and Carib language that he uses translatively as the point of entrance into comprehension of this Antillean episteme.

The translative mode of linguistic performance engaged by Monchoachi is one that employs French as the medium through which Creole specificity can be articulated, using French to reveal the philosophical depth contained within both the Creole language and the Caribbean episteme, finding French valuable for the greater reach it affords this Creole linguistic exhibition. Thus, even while Monchoachi is clear about his disdain for modes of being that he finds to be inherent in French and European thought and language, his theoretical approach to elaborating a Creole postcoloniality remains relational; most importantly, he reclaims alienation as a foundational aspect of the formation of Caribbean subjectivity, and theorizes this subjectivity as engaged in a seductive dance. In the holistic conceptualization of a creoleness and a performativity that is not reducible to essential content, Monchoachi brings performance and language together in an expression based in embodied action, and that works perfectly for processing, through poetry, a linguistic manifestation of creole ritual practices.

After analyses of a Caribbean politics and expression exemplified by a postcolonial Creole multilingualism, the chapter ""On écrit d'abord pour soi": The Autobiographical Masquerade of Maryse Condé" telescopes in to the corrective role individual expression can play within communitarian postcolonial creation. Condé's oeuvre is well-known for its lack of local authentication factors: a comparative lack of Creole language use, errancy away from the geographic space of the Caribbean, and focus on woman protagonists that, exiles like their creator, infrequently represent the disadvantaged subjectivities privileged in Créoliste ideologies. Condé's difference from the norm does not come without polemics, and the author has embraced the role of contrarian, ready to defend her unconventional characters and the works in which they appear. This chapter thus focuses on various forms of life-writing that appear in Condé's oeuvre, including novels with strong self-referential elements, semi-autobiographical "tales," a memoire-like narrative, and numerous and multiplying interviews, videos, and films focused both on her life and literary work. In these texts, the distance between truth and reality is being flamboyantly tested by Condé, which makes them provocative material from which the relationship between women's life-writing and performance can be explored. We find that Condé's semi-autobiographical oeuvre performatively challenges the exclusionary claims to community that are often at the core of unifying nationalist discourses, like *créolité*, that often become seen as representative. Condé sidesteps such cultural nationalist norms, finding a more individualist and polemical way of being simultaneously Guadeloupean, visible, and part of the larger world.

Carnival language in Trinidad is ripe with transitions, interruptions, vulgarities, and opacities that vernaculars and Creoles enact upon standardized languages, as they follow a multilingual, translative logic. And these very same interruptions and vulgarities are also enacted by Carnival masqueraders, dancers, musicians, and artists upon the norms of "respectability" that were inherited from the colonial past. In the chapter "Rewriting the National Story: Respectability and the "Carnival Mentality," I frame my theorization of Carnival's performative translativity through Peter Wilson's theory of the Caribbean's *respectability* vs. *reputation* divide in his study *Crab Antics: the Social Anthropology of English-speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean*. I explore how Carnival practices have, since before independence, negotiated between the "vulgarity" of local behavior and the "respectability" that the nation-state must profess in emulation of colonial standards. Carnival as a cultural practice has undeniably gone from symbol of resistance to exemplar of consumerism, and the latter is of a kind with Wilson's concept of reputation. The festival is not only composed of performative arts such as song, dance, and masking, it is also performative in its state-sponsored re-play of older genres of Carnival music and older forms of masquerade that are understood (or promoted) as tradition—the attributes that easily demonstrate respectability. But Carnival, even while a largely capitalist event that meets international consumer demands through state management, is still the default space of expression for the mass of Trinidadian as well as many other Caribbean peoples, not only through the expression it produces, but also through the way that that expression is received, reproduced, circulated, and perhaps most commonly, imitated. In the translative dynamics of Carnival's visual and verbal expression, we see emerging the

complexities of a need for global recognition coupled with the irreducible impulse to act directly, blatantly, and exhibitively in disobedience of the respectability that ensures this recognition. In this dynamic, expression is simultaneously complicit in a hierarchical system and rebellious against its demands, emerging finally as the only arguable given of this Caribbean festival's "character": translative carnivalism.

# CHAPTER 1

## *DRUMS AND COLOURS* : WALCOTT'S MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITY

> "I come from a place that likes grandeur; it likes large gestures; it is not inhibited by flourish; it is a rhetorical society; it is a society of physical performance; it is a society of style…. It's better to be large and to make huge gestures than to be modest and do tiptoeing types of presentations of oneself. Even if it's a private platform, it is a platform."
>
> —Derek Walcott, Interview with Edward Hirsch

> "Oh, where the feller with the language to explain to this man?"
>
> —Derek Walcott, *Drums and Colours*

Language, in my second epigraph, is part of a problem. It is the missing component in a failed act of communication, one that leaves the speaker frustrated with his interlocutor. Although obviously gifted with language himself, the speaker is unprepared for or disinclined to the task of using it to "explain," at least not in the way that the other demands. Perhaps indeed his language cannot explain. The practice of translation is often seen as the process that overcomes problems of language, playing the role of the "feller" that would "explain" something previously foreign, making all language accessible and opening up the world. Yet the above citation conveys the

limits of that promise in its tone of frustration, in its expression of an absence and a searching: is the promise of translation always available, the possibility of understanding? What if translation cannot solve language problem; what if the problem language is divided, doubled, or opaque, what if it cannot explain? And does the Creole speaker who expresses frustration lack the ability (the language) to translate, or is he simply not interested in that task? What happens, one must ask, when literature, through language, engages with the possibilities of linguistic opacity, practicing a disjunctive means to meaning? In the above speaker's unwillingness to explain, what can he offer instead of meaning?

Juxtaposed with this resistance to transparent communication, my first epigraph presents the possibility of excess expression, and identifies it as characteristically Caribbean. Derek Walcott's words can be read in light of Edouard Glissant's claims about the origins and tenor of Creole language in the Caribbean, summarized, "Creole organizes speech as a blast of sound" (*Caribbean Discourse* 124). In addition to associating Creole "pitch" and "pace" to the "rhythm of the drum," Glissant locates the impenetrable volume of Creole speech in the plantation slavery past: "the alienated body of the slave, in the time of slavery, is in fact deprived, in an attempt at complete dispossession, of speech. Self-expression is not only forbidden, but impossible to envisage" (122). He goes on to explain that when language emerges from this repression, it is a Creole whose meaning goes beyond the semantics that the European master would understand, for the "Creole spoken by the *békés* was never shouted out loud," while the Creole spoken by the enslaved signified as much through its pitch and volume as through its speed. Glissant excludes these

*békés* (European slaveholders) from his idea of "Caribbean" when he states that "Caribbean speech is always excited, it ignores silence, softness, sentiment" (123). This is where Glissant presents his well-known thesis that "Creole is originally a kind of conspiracy that concealed itself by its public and open expression" (124-125).

In the first Walcott epigraph, the "excited speech" that results from Glissant's analysis transfers to Walcott's characterization of Caribbean expression as "large gestures." Walcott does not linger on the plantation, and he does not, ultimately, exclude the *béké* from his own fictionalized retelling of Caribbean history in his play *Drums and Colours* that I will analyze here. Yet the repeated conception of a poetics of excess in everyday Caribbean expression, the "perfect poetic concept and practice" (124) in Glissant, and "the right flourish" in Walcott both reiterate the idea of an excess begun in language and carried further through the body in an aesthetically rich physical performance that exceeds semantics. The direct relation between dramatic expression and Creole language presents itself as a Caribbean commonplace for both these writers, even if they come from historically and linguistically distinct Caribbean sites. Furthermore, this performative expression emerges in particular when, against the past of slavery and colonization, questions of self-expression, freedom, and autonomy are being explicitly engaged. In this reading of Derek Walcott's *Drums and Colours*, the modes of self-expression that become available to the newly free, newly independent Caribbean subject becomes the literary practice of performative multilingualism.

Apart from Glissant's historically based but aesthetically inclined thesis about Creole-language origins, linguistics have presented various forceful and sometimes

competing theories about how Creole languages came into being. For Robert Chaudenson, it is a derivation from an institutionally dominant European language, while for Claire Lefebvre, Creole is primarily inherited from persistent African linguistic forms. In both of these cases and Glissant's as well, Creole origins are understood in a dialectic: a reencountering, revising, a commerce between linguistic systems. In contemporary use, Creoles continue to coexist with English, French, or Dutch in the Caribbean, and these European languages, imbricated in the colonial histories of the region, continue to hold institutional authority, even for now independent nations. For whole populations, the heterolingual is constitutive of discourse, whether oral, mediatic, or, as here, literary. Switching easily back and forth between Creole and a European language, according to context, class, or medium, is an everyday practice.

For contemporary literature of the twentieth and twenty-first century, in particular of the post/colonial period of the latter twentieth century in the Anglophone Caribbean, writing between Creole and English is typical, and fluidity between them is the dominant practice. Even if multilingual literature presents a degree of linguistic opacity for readers outside its limited local readerships, strictly monolingual writing is uncommon in the region, particularly for literary works that explicitly engage in representation of the region, its people, history, and cultural logics.[1] The strategic or representational negotiation between Creole and English or centers on difference, calling attention to the borders between languages, and renders that differentially

[1] Emily Apter's *The Translation Zone* presents a useful overview of the Malthusian dynamics that determine much literary production in marginal languages, and from marginalized global sites, using the specific example of Algerian literature between Arabic and French.

opaque space conspicuous and compelling. It is visible in text, audible, marked by the "rhetorical flourish" referenced by Walcott, or the unavoidable "blast" suggested by Glissant. The "problem" of meaning and readability that is confronted in multilingual writing becomes rather the force of Caribbean literature, a force that balances style and noise. The potentially opaque (Creole) language(s), embedded in and interrupting the otherwise fluid (English/French) standard, exhibits its existence even as it asserts its power as the impenetrable. Heterolingual creoleness, in these cases, is the blatant invitation to read and encounter the Caribbean without expecting to fully understand.

**Heterolingual address**

The term *heterolingual*, as I use it here, comes from translation thinker Naoki Sakai's theorization of nationalism in Japan. Sakai proposes the notion of the heterolingual address in answer to reductive equivalences between language and nation. His provocative suggestion that expression need not presume either an ideal (monolingual) audience, or assume that audience's comprehension of the discourse in question, allows us to conclude that meaning is not always available and rarely transparent. More importantly, the expectation of an absolutely shared monolingualism between speaker and audience is discredited, regardless of context, nation, birth, or education. The assertion, here, that all discourse can be mis-read, re-read, or multiply interpreted, indeed, that all expression requires translation, gives particular value to the overt multilingualism of Caribbean expression. By these terms, rather than read Caribbean literary multilingualism as merely representational and deliberately obscurantist, we see the epistemological challenge it presents to presumptions of transparency in

discourse from any context. Dominant languages here lose all privileged claims to clarity, accessibility, or universality, and local tongues, like the very situated Creoles of the Caribbean, are given new validity as the very existence of categories "standard" and "non-standard" for languages is called into question. Herein lies the particular power and potential of the heterolingual address: its inherent capacity to challenge homolingual culture and expression as a basis of domination. Its translativity is where I locate the "loudness" and "flourish" of Creole expression, rhetorical characteristics that are both relational and profoundly performative.[2]

**Derek Walcott and the Translative**

Derek Walcott, the Caribbean's first Nobel laureate, not only creates multilingual texts, but his *oeuvre* as a whole is linguistically fluid, with a French-based St Lucian Creole appearing alongside English, and with bilingual and multilingual works staging the ongoing negotiation between denigrated and privileged languages.[3] In much of his multilingual writing, Walcott thus engages directly with language as a means to

[2] I continue to use the term "multilingualism" in conjunction with "heterolingualism" in this article in order to indicate the participation of my literary analyses in a broader tradition of multilingualism, opening up comparison with multilingual writing in Africa, South Asia, and the United States, for example. Thus, I use the term "multilingualism" in discussions of the literary text specifically.

[3] Walcott's work has often been critically received as not Creole enough, particularly in comparison with his peer and contemporary Kamau Brathwaite (King 66, 77). Rhonda Cobham-Sander convincingly argues, however, that Walcott's formation in the linguistically complex St. Lucian capital, with its interchange of the embattled French-based Creole, of standardized English, and also of an English-based Creole more common to the British West Indies and gaining in institutional power during Walcott's youth, demands care in evaluating his purported dis/use of Creole. She points out (and demonstrates) the unique difficulties of incorporating St. Lucia's French-based Creole in Walcott's primarily English-based (and English-influenced) works when the work of translation becomes multiplied between the three tongues. Claims of Walcott's limited use of Creole, however, are easily dismissed by multiple examples within his oeuvre, and as demonstrated in various periods in which he explicitly participates in Creole literary movements or initiatives, as Bruce King documents (142-143). The play studied here, in any case, is an unquestionable example of this, and this dissertation seeks in part to reevaluate such claims by demonstrate the profound performative possibilities available in Walcott's approach to multilingualism.

opacity: the value and complexity of *language itself* is one of the fundamental propositions of the text I will analyze here, where the form of his Creole poetics is both specific, employing local vernaculars within the Caribbean, and more widely conceived, as it engages in play between these Creoles and other non-regional non-standardized tongues. In *Drums and Colours*, we encounter various Jamaican, Barbadian, Trinidadian and Haitian Creoles, as well as American vernacular and the lingua franca of slave traders, based in Latinate European languages, and finally, of course, standardized English. These various vernaculars cross an expansive geography where the life and history of Creoles span the dialectics of orality and standardization; where political autonomy might be affirmed against practices of racial denigration and hierarchy; and where economic conditions meet all extremes of wealth, development, and destitution. The multilingualism of Walcott's work helps construct a translative logic behind to the coexistence of these extremes. Attention to this translative multilingualism allows us to read Caribbean literature in a way that reveals it to be always simultaneously engaged with a local history (of colonialism and coloniality), culture (of creoleness and creolization), aesthetics (of orality) and epistemology (of opacity). What does that most visible and material experimentation with language bring to Caribbean expression? The constant return to doubled, intertwined, and interruptive engagement with language*s*, the *translative* that relationally meets the demand for visibility and legitimacy, invites or demands performance, a mode which switches between selves in the politically and culturally undefined aftermath of colonization.

Theorizing a performative visibility as translative directly confronts the traditional translation trope of invisibility: the disappearance of the translator and translation process in what remains as an ostensibly static, translated product. Traditionally, when translation is not foregrounded, the coexistence of dual language traditions in a translated work is flattened into a new monolingualism, erasing the meditation upon difference that produced it.[4] But multilingual Creole texts relationally perform difference; their interruptive structures make difference visible and effective, and they demand acknowledgment, if not recognition. The translative incorporates the movement between languages as much as it evacuates the presumption that meaning be semantically communicated through them. Instead of meaning, translative performance focuses on what is exposed or staged in the negotiation, and its subsequent potential for power. Performative multilingual expression can be the most meaningful action and expression of tenacity in a Caribbean literary ontology, especially when answering the absence of freedom, visibility, and validity.

### *Drums* and Independence

Such tenacity inheres in every scene of Walcott's *Drums and Colours,* where each moment of multilingual enunciation in the text is a challenge, daring the reader to make it speak, and mean, properly. Walcott selects key moments out of "the four hundred years of West Indian history" to devise an "Epic" that could represent the

[4] Indeed, the presumption of monolingualism, as Jacques Derrida's meditation on its colonial legacies in *The Monolingualism of the Other* suggests, inevitably either produces or elides a constitutive multilingualism in the very formation of the question, such that all context that produces such pretention to, or ideology of, monolingualism reveals easily an underlying multilingualism.

newly independent Federation of the formerly British West Indies.[5] The pageant was commissioned as part of the celebration planned for the West Indies Federation's first legislative meeting in Trinidad, clearly connecting the performance to the first official exercise of political autonomy. The historical events, however, are represented as drama only once they are framed by Carnival, one that is interrupted by an eager masquerader that spontaneously decides to put on a "serious play" (120). Neither professional actors nor historians, these amateur "players" select scenes from history as arbitrarily as the availability of a Carnival masquerader whose costume could represent a historical figure. Thus, we begin with Columbus' expulsion from the colonies, see colonial traders at work in Cadiz, witness their trasportation of African slaves to the West Indies by boat, and follow an Amerindian sailing to Europe and transforming the imaginary of the Europeans he encounters, including a young Walter Raleigh. Then we return to the Antilles to see this same Raleigh send his son to his death in a quest to find the storied El Dorado. In a brief, humorous interlude, the heroes switch back to their unheroic roles as Carnival masqueraders just long enough to make fun of Barbadians. Finally, we witness Toussaint Louverture's rise to leadership of the Haitian Revolutionary and his betrayal, George William Gordon's

[5] Noel Vaz, in the "Original Foreword to *Drums and Colours*," reprinted with the version of *Drums and Colours* that appears in the *Caribbean Quarterly* issue dedicated to Walcott, offers some insight into the questions of genre and the goals of the production which, it was already decided, would be a "drama depicting the four hundred years of West Indian history": "Should the piece be a history lesson told in a series of tableaux with commentary—a pageant, in fact colourful and shifting, but at best a facile convention with little real significance? Or might it be conceived as a dramatic text with a linked sequence, a saga told by a poet with concern and insight? After reading the scripts by a Trinidadian and two Jamaican authors we soon realized that to stage scores of little disconnected scenarios, fodder for a dozen possible films, would be unsatisfactory and well nigh impossible. Finally in August 1957, the Extra-Mural Department commissioned Derek Walcott, poet and playwright, to write the "Epic" as it was subsequently called." In my analyses, I use the terms "play," "drama," "epic," and also "pageant" in order to recognize the shifting intentions that lay behind this text, but also to acknowledge the difficulty of fixing one genre, with its limits and its history, onto a work that was meant to witness an entirely new and still undefined cultural entity.

incitement of rebellion among Jamaican slaves, and, at the end, we are left with a scene of multicultural rebels who seek, haphazardly, to come to an understanding of who they are and what their purpose might be, as emancipation bleeds into the play's present "event": independence through Federation.

A complex engagement with social and economic power, with political decolonization staged upon a lingering coloniality, the heady newness of autonomy is dynamically enacted in the interstices of the multilingual poetics to which Walcott here gives voice. An early literary contribution to representative Caribbean cultural and political identity, this work responds to the need for identifying local characteristics that could symbolically represent the region. What would a pan-Caribbean Federation mean in literary terms? One of the play's clear propositions lies in its multilingual engagement with Creole language, and another is the doubled choice of performance—not only through its genre of drama, but also for its layering of Carnival masquerade logics upon that drama. In embracing a logic of performance through theme (Carnival), genre (drama), and language (multilingualism), *Drums and Colours* takes on the ambitious project of unifying a heretofore colonized, fragmented, and culturally denigrated region by indicating that the unfamiliar practice of creative and political autonomy, of self-determination and independence, can be *acted out*.

*Drums and Colours* is one of Walcott's earlier and generally forgotten works.[6] The Federation was the first attempt at political independence from Great Britain, so

[6] In general, Walcott's oeuvre is split between his poetry and his plays, with the former being better known internationally. However, his plays have a particular relevance within the region because of their greater accessibility, and tend to deal more explicitly with local themes. Tejumola Olaniyan provides a helpful but provocative overview of the primary preoccupations of Walcott's oeuvre, which he describes as advocating a "liminal" "mulatto" space: "Walcott's conception of a liminal space

this pan-Caribbean spectacular initiates the rewriting of Caribbean history from the perspective of the new Caribbean citizen.[7] As we see in its use of Carnival, it would do so by saturating the play with local cultural forms, and by invoking the requisite glorious narrative that might bring provisional prestige to this previously nonexistent regional entity of the British West Indies. The ill-fated Federation would eventually fracture into various distinct Caribbean nations after barely four years, but it was launched with great enthusiasm and optimism for a unified Caribbean region in 1958. In an exuberance of excess thanks to its expansive form and its Carnival framing, *Drums and Colours* celebrated the autonomy that the Caribbean people were to finally enjoy. Ultimately, even while the Federation was fated to fail, this text by Walcott serves as literary documentation of the hopes, desires, and imaginary inspired by decolonization and independence. Perhaps quixotic in its attempt to encompass the multiple histories, peoples, and even landscapes that made up the Caribbean in that moment, it is today suggestive of the imaginative possibilities of a regional specificity. Having extended his episodic history beyond the Anglophone West Indian islands that were slated to enter the Federation, Walcott paid significant attention to the already independent Haiti and the separately decolonizing Guyana, the latter distinct in not sharing the island ontology of most other Caribbean sites. As such, Walcott's project

---

unencumbered by the divisive and fractious realities of Caribbean history is anchored by two related propositions in his cultural theory: mimicry as the origin of traditions, and history as myth. (Liminal Spaces 200). Olaniyan critiques what he identifies as an idealized, "romantic" liminal space, one in which history is not present. However, he asserts ultimately that Walcott's dramatic oeuvre does not, finally, stay true to his non-fiction writings, but does indeed engage in a more grounded representation of the colonial past and its repercussions in the present.

[7] We know from Bruce King that the young Walcott was deeply invested in this pan-Caribbean independence, and was involved from early in conceptualizing its expression and political investments. This investments continue through maturity, and one expression of it lies in his founding of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop.

already had regional ambitions. Today, as it is republished half a century after independence, this epic play is still valuable in imagining the shared logics of cultural, linguistic, and political practices across the Caribbean. At the very least, its independence context and intention offers insight into how the Caribbean let itself be imagined politically, linguistically, and culturally in a time of hope, a time that made room for the illusion of unity, or at the very least, regional solidarity. It also reminds us of the vulnerability of the very practice of decolonization.

**Creole Nationalism**

Seen as a privileged site of national and cultural identity, language has played an important role in defining Caribbean specificity, particularly for literature. In the Anglophone territories, Creole languages had been formerly associated with slavery and poverty, and racialized such that both became associated with blackness.[8] The work of uplifting historically denigrated Creole languages had already been started at several moments by intellectuals who sought to invert these characterizations into the core material out of which an organic, local, creole cultural patrimony of the Caribbean could emerge, based in its laboring lower classes. Well known is the Beacon group, whose founders Alfred Mendes and C.L.R. James produced short stories and novels that ranged from representations of dynamics between European planters and their servants and slaves to romanticized accounts of the emerging urban

[8] It is also worth noting that in the Francophone context, "*nègre*" was historically used interchangeably with "slave," such that questions of first freedom, dignity, and later, autonomy would become contingent on revising the systematic denigration of blackness.

lower class, typified through the soon recognizable genre of yard fiction.[9] Using Creole in dialogues between their lower class characters, the Beacon group undertook the strange and volatile work of giving oral language practices form in written text. Even before Mendes and James, who were instigators of a traceably nationalist movement, the serial publication *Creole Bitters*, created as early as 1892 (Pactor 115), with H. Billouin as editor (Sherwood 113), had begun chronicling local culture and investing in Creole language literary production through creole folklore and short stories that reveled in local practices, from drinking rum to practicing obeah, to participating in Carnival. More commonly associated with creole nationalist ideologies today, however, is the multivalent E. K. Brathwaite, historian and poet, whose academic engagement with "creole" as an independence-appropriate cultural category (*Creole Society*) and later poetic engagement with what he calls "nation language" poetics (*History of Voice)*, have been taken as foundational to the conscious and engaged reappropriation of a Creole Caribbean poetics, albeit through Afrocentric themes, as the only viable and liberated answer to the linguistic alienation retained from colonial domination.[10]

Brathwaite is frequently counterposed to Walcott, whose essays and interviews reveal a decided ambivalence towards Creole as a national language. It might be worth

[9] For more information on the Beacon Group and their nationalist work, see Leah Rosenberg's *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*.

[10] The racialized politics of this creole culture reclamation is far from straightforward. The privileging of a brown middle class in Brathwaite's *Creole Society* is worth noting, particularly in contrast with his later, more politicized advocacy of cultural nationalism that rehabilitates African traditions and a sense of African heritage, insisting on the African roots of cultural and linguistic practices, and participating in a post-independence Black Power politics that will notoriously run counter to Walcott's "mulatto poetics." Meanwhile, many of Brathwaite's forebears in creole cultural reclamation, in particular the Beacon group, have been identified as "Creoles" whose commitment or at least understanding of the poor black populations have fallen short, as very carefully illustrated by Harvey Neptune's *Caliban and the Yankees.*

noting that, as Tejumola Olaniyan remarked in his appraisal of Walcott's prose-theatre-poetry ambiguities, reading Walcott's essays can provide a very limited view of his literary practice (199). It is also relevant here that the Walcott-Brathwaite dichotomy emerged at the moment of the rise of Black Power and their differing attitudes towards it,[11] but that that debate came significantly after the independence moment that interests us here, as does Brathwaite's first explicit assertions of the *necessity* for "nation language" in poetic practice in the 1980's (*History of Voice*). Yet, in the contrast between Walcott and Brathwaite that proceeds vigorously in the decades to follow this 1958 play, one important aspect is telling. Brathwaite wholeheartedly embraces an indigenizing position on language and culture that reaches into a substantive and verifiable African heritage to mobilize an epistemological challenge to the domination of English language within the Caribbean context. Walcott, meanwhile, emerges unwilling to underwrite such a clearly defined racial, ethnic, or even cultural experience. I would suggest that this is at least partially due to the value of performance in his oeuvre, perhaps most apparent in his works of theatre, but still present in his poetry.[12] In the multiplicitous, and more aptly for this study, multi-voiced negotiation that is vigorously explored throughout his dramas, the value of Caribbean indigeneity lies not so much in an opposition or combination of Europe and Africa, Creole or English, but rather in the "choice" of being able to act in

[11] The representative essay on this division is Patricia Ismond's, which summarizes the stakes of and participants in the Walcott-Brathwaite debate, paying particular attention to Brathwaite's nationalist stance of resistance in order to argue that finally, as a poetic project, it offers no more powerful politics than Walcott's. Rhonda Cobham-Sander's recent article updates Ismond's arguments to show that Walcott in fact benefitted greatly from what Cobham-Sander illustrates to be a vigorous and powerful Creole-language poetics in Brathwaite.

[12] In his interview with Edward Hirsch, Walcott decidedly blurs the distinctions between his poetry and his plays, suggesting that the former retains its traditional oral character for him.

(or in-between) both.[13] Eschewing essences, even of a certain Caribbeanness, the closest Walcott comes to envisioning a Caribbean cultural practice is to imagine the putting on and taking off of masks, the acting and enacting of the various available parts, a multiplication, along with language and expressive systems, of the means to expression and action.

**Protective opacity**

*Drums and Colours'* historical perspective locates Caribbean multilingual specificity in the first moments of "discovery" and conquest, where Walcott already foregrounds linguistic play as basic to enacting power and legitimacy. In a scene that retells Walter Raleigh's insistent quest to further penetrate America and find El Dorado, disillusioned Spanish Governor Berrio addresses the quixotic Raleigh before the fatal expedition into the Guyanese interior:

> There is no El Dorado.
>
> There is a story devised for malice by the Indians.
>
> It is a vicious fable, it is like Atlantis, it is like
>
> Columbus's Cipango, like your own John Mandeville.
>
> The more you pierce Guiana and explore it,
>
> Pages of pages part before you, volumes of forest;

[13] In a 1982 Interview, Walcott asserts the difference between the two perspectives: "what I'm saying is that the artist has the duality of confidence in either language…. He can choose either tool he likes. But when you have someone else who is not a writer, or an artist, patriotically affirming that this is our language then just purely as an academic exercise, for the sake of an examination, or for the sake of getting a job, beginning to treat English as some kind of device by which one can advance oneself, purely for that reason, then you are limiting what I still think is the range of the West Indian experience. Which is world-wide range" (64).

But El Dorado has no meaning, there are the bones

of ruined Spanish expeditions, and nothing else. (197)

This "story" of El Dorado is being attributed to some wily "Indians" with a fatal sense of humor, but it is also presented as familiar, albeit through different names: Atlantis, Cipango, or John Mandeville, each word translating the other and all, apparently, equivalent and interchangeable. Yet, according to Berrio's epistemology, these latter versions are more recognizable, more suitable to his meaning, than the indigestible Indian tale. The colonial deauthorization of native narratives through translation is being staged here, as is the scornful dismissal of all that is not of "civilization."[14] The Guyanese forest, impenetrable and dangerous, can still summarily be treated as something that is known: known reductively as dark, savage, devoid of meaning. Yet even as he dismisses the region wholesale, Berrio inadvertently reveals the power of its darkness. Through a combination of the natives' guile, capitalizing on the colonizers' own self-defeating scorn for the other, Guyanese gold has remained protected under the cover of an opaque story "devised… by the Indians." The lack of meaning, the endless pages of adventure without precious metal fruit, and the Amerindians' elaborate reproduction, embellishment, and enactment of the Spanish colonizers' own over-inflated Eldorado myth serves to protect their land's material wealth, their civilization susceptible to invasion and corruption from crushing cultural monopolies, and their peoples' lives, expendable to the explorers. The Amerindian tale protects and performs through story, producing bones of the would-be plunderers,

[14] For more on the role translation plays in colonial projects to transform and delegitimate the native and his work, see Tejaswini Niranjana's seminal *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*

distillers, and digesters of native space, making a mockery of the meaningful categories of the presumably more recognizable stories and fables.

Throughout *Drums and Colours'* representation of colonial communication and commerce, the obtuseness of conquistadors is regularly counterposed to a wily underdog in the colonized. As the reader is taken through snapshots of imperialism and the traffic in humans, resources, and land, linguistic fluidity is already the norm and it carries, for the adept, a performative potential for material survival. This performance, however, is absent in scenes such as the former, where Raleigh and Berrio ponder the mystical specificities of this new world but do not participate in or identify with it. Every aspect of the Americas, from its native peoples to its landscape to its vegetation, generates an impenetrable opacity, but as nothing native to this space is given a voice in this excerpt, we have no occasion to see how that opacity is performatively made visible. As the analyses that follow show, the trickster multiplicity that interests us will be practiced only by future denizens of this Caribbean space—marked by their linguistic manipulation and their ascription to (or emergence out of) the New World—in situations of heterolingual address where various worlds come into contact. In Berrio and Raleigh's scene, these colonizing explorers, operating in the logics of transparency and penetration, have no use for the unreadable opacity of multilingual expression.

**From "Action" to Acting: Arendt and Caribbean Autonomy**

The multivocal, moving, and expansive choice of form in this play however, the choice of the epic play[15] and the carnival frame, invites theorization that links the multilingual Creole poetics Walcott practices here to performance. The value of Creole multilingualism in a Caribbean nationalist text is hardly under debate, so I am interested also in what this vocation to performance might bring to the nation-making work to which the work is dedicated, commemorative of a decisive act of decolonization and of the initiation of the political machinery of self-legislation that comes with autonomy. What might be political about the performative for these future Caribbean citizens, and how does this help us in reading performance in multilingual Creole poetics?

A detour into Hannah Arendt's theorization of the political through "action" in *The Human Condition* proves useful here for understanding the political gravity of performance. For Arendt, action is what makes people human and what makes them political: "Speech and action… are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but qua men" (176). Humans cannot be men without appearing to each other, but to appear to each other they must act: "All life without speech and without action… is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a

[15] In the "Original Foreword," reproduced in the *Caribbean Quarterly* reprinting of the entire play in an issue dedicated to Walcott, the director Noel Vaz explained the importance of deciding on the form for what was already decided to be a "drama depicting the four hundred years of West Indian history": "Should the piece be a history lesson told in a series of tableaux with commentary—a pageant, in fact colourful and shifting, but at best a facile convention with little real significance? Or might it be conceived as a dramatic text with a linked sequence, a saga told by a poet with concern and insight? After reading the scripts by a Trinidadian and two Jamaican authors we soon realized that to stage scores of little disconnected scenarios, fodder for a dozen possible films, would be unsatisfactory and well nigh impossible. Finally in August 1957, the Extra-Mural Department commissioned Derek Walcott, poet and playwright, to write the "Epic" as it was subsequently called."

human life because it is no longer lived among men" (176). Thus, appearing to other men constitutes "a life lived among men." A "human life," then, automatically enters men into relation with each other as political beings. The dual effectiveness of "action and speech," appearing always together as Arendt elaborates their definitions, has obvious resonances with the genre under consideration here:

> The specific revelatory quality of action and speech, the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker, is so indissolubly tied to the living flux of acting and speaking that it can be represented and "reified" only through a kind of repetition, the imitation or mimesis, which according to Aristotle prevails in all arts but is actually appropriate only to the drama." (187)

Drama, for Arendt, is here presented as the form of art most appropriate to political action.

While her exploration of the political specificity of drama does not extend into an expansion of the specific nature of what she calls "Action" into the "acting" of theatrical performance, the elaboration begs to be made. What is it about the notion of "acting" in performance that might invite reflection on the other kind of performance, the engaged "doing" of Arendt's more explicitly political notion of "Action"? If we think of a similar duality in the term "performance," the juxtaposition seems even more appropriate. Marvin Carlson clarifies two distinct concepts of performance in his essay "What is Performance," in which he speaks, first, about "the idea of public display of technical skills… this traditional concept of "performance" (71), and then, of "Pretending to be someone other than oneself" or "a certain distance between "self" and behavior, analogous to that between an actor and the role the actor plays on stage"

(72). This double possibility of performance, as he summarizes it from Richard Schechner, distinguishes between action that "performs" (on a stage) and action that is actually "doing" off the stage. Yet, ultimately, Carlson privileges a combined conceptualization of the "act" that seeks recognition of a skill, and the "acting" which takes on a role, noting that "Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self" (73).

What we want to take away from this juxtaposition of Arendtian political action and contemporary theorizations of performance is the suggestive possibility that acting, attempting to be something else, other, or new, in the sense of trying to (re)produce a certain image, ideal, or goal, can in itself be the very material of political engagement. Which is to say that performance, not merely an art for spectatorship, might itself be the constitutive practice of "appearing to each other," of existing "among men," and of participating in the collective and communal activity of nation or culture formation. While the political context of Walcott's epic work is clear, his use of community might consist in Arendtian "action" through a notion of theatrical "acting" in the everyday; in this work, all serious community formation can rely on performance in relation to embodying a goal or ideal or standard for that imagined community. These imagined possibilities in Walcott's drama are essential for understanding what underlies the Carnivalist performance and exhibition in the multilingual Creole masquerades of this literary text—especially, as Arendt never fails to show, speech always accompanies action.

While bringing Arendt's Aristotelian analysis into a discussion of Walcott's postcolonial play may seem disjunctive, numerous affinities between the two writers suggest otherwise. By reading Hannah Arendt's discussion on "Action" in *The Human Condition* in conjunction with *Drums and Colors*, a shared humanist optimism arises between both. The resonances between their visions for the political, the expressive, and the individual construct a similarity of intention that invites comparison. Arendt offers a realistic yet glorious portrait of the human who *acts*, finding everything excusable within the impulse to begin again and again. Written with a certain urgency against the context of human surrender to the automatism and destruction of technological advancement, her project complements the cautious enthusiasm of Walcott's play as well as various of his essays ("Culture or Mimicry," "The Muse"), arising as it is out of a bitter history into an unreliable present. In Arendt and Walcott, the strength of conviction in the human requires, more than hope, such a force of will that both seek support in theological ideas or writings, a recourse all the more striking when, in each case, religious zeal is anathema to their ideals of creative or intellectual freedom. Recurring in both is the pressing sense of the vulnerability of the space for political practice—a vulnerability confirmed, in Walcott's case, by the Federation's demise—coupled with an insistent overcoming of this frail hope through a conviction in "newness."

Over the following analysis of Walcott's text, my intention is to show how the Arendtian understanding of action comes in to inform the kind of performative expression portrayed at various moments of the play—in particular, the form of expression in the culminating moment where Walcott offers us his best version of a

Caribbean collective, the very Caribbean people who will from this moment benefit from all the anxieties as well as pleasures of political and cultural autonomy. As will become clear, Caribbean performance follows its own logics, based in a colonial history and postcolonial future that cannot simply be collapsed with the Aristotelian politics Arendt relies on. However, "action" offers a compelling theoretical foundation for building a specific understanding of the stakes of performative politics in the Caribbean, even while, as with its multilingual challenge to most standards, the version we encounter here exceeds, yet again, the classic model.

**Coloniality and linguistic manipulation**

In the first half of *Drums and Colours,* Paco, a "half-Indian" character who is taken away from his island to subsist in Spanish ports, learns to manipulate his language and accent to feed into European attitudes of supremacy that ultimately feed his wallet. In his role as a pimp and hustler in Cadiz, we see him code switching between a reduced English and a masterful and smooth diction. "Went up and down the wharfs, what you expect me, / Look in the gutters, too? No pay since breakfast" (152) represents his conversation with the broker who hires him, while and to the curious Jew seeking to emigrate: "Sure! Las Indias? Fine, plenty sea, sun, green country. / Jews, Tainos, Lucayos, I come from there, beautiful. / You pay me first, señor?" (155). Paco's fragmented speech performs the stereotype of an inarticulate, inferior being. When begging from the powerful, he adopts the bumbling syntax of the "savage" that they expect, a linguistic manipulation useful for getting paid. However, when speaking to (and competing with) his peers, Paco wields a powerful and sophisticated prose. After

the Broker and the Jew clear the scene, he speaks to a nearby beggar, his equal, who tries to grab his money: "Go pick up garbage, you sickness. / I earned this fairly, I did work for it, / I'm not a bad singer of vile songs" (162). No, Paco is rather a good singer, and sings just the type of song that highlights his difference from the norm, and ensures his place in the ruthless colonial economy. Unlike his monolingual European competitor, his capacity for linguistic negotiation allows him to differentially exhibit specificity, a specificity doubly important because it ensures his survival. Through his translative prowess, he bridges the doubled stereotype that Europeans have of Amerindians as simultaneously sly (proffered by Captain Berrio), and illiterate (assumed by European mercantilists), all to his gain. It is worth noting, nonetheless, that at this point in Walcott's history, which, I intend to show, follows a chronology consistent with a growing multilingualism, the duality exhibited by this character remains split. We also see, alternating with the conspicuousness of a constantly changing language and register, the sinister use of invisibility, where the effectiveness of Paco's game relies on the possibility of hiding his talents, quite like an individual version of the Glissantian "open conspiracy" theory of Creole. This invisibility, however, accompanies the "forced poetics that Glissant decries, and is the condition of disenfranchisement that we will see in the character of Victoire in my third chapter on Maryse Condé.[16]

Walcott's attention to the mercenary pervades *Drums and Colours* and is central to his critique of history. While his nuanced characterizations circumvent the

[16] In *Caribbean Discourse,* Glissant states: "Creole is originally a kind of conspiracy that concealed itself by its public and open expression" (124-125). The implication is that Creole speakers shared secret meanings among themselves, non-semantic meaning that the plantation owner and foremen, who technically understand Creole themselves, would not even know they do not have access to.

dichotomies of blame between colonizer and colonized, the symbolic gold coin, a motif that appears in the first scene and that reemerges regularly to tempt and disfigure solidarities throughout the play, highlights the pervasiveness of colonial greed. One of the consistencies of Walcott's writing, particularly in his essays, is his attention to poverty and dispossession that is an unavoidable aspect of colonialism and its post- and neo- incarnations, irreducible to only racio-colonial hierarchies.[17] In *Drums and Colours,* the commodification of personhood produces a kind of linguistic self-dispossession that is practiced by Paco, who cultivates the image (or sound) that renders his person saleable, but who, it is clear, is also privy to a surplus of language. His verbal acrobatics mask and protect his material vulnerability as a disposable "native" subject subsisting on the shores of an antagonistic mercantile empire.

We read in Paco an individual's remarkable transformation by a ruthless system into a savvy and brazen player, but his isolation is stark. His multilingual talents are not all mercenary, which we see in the next scene where he is now an aged "Indian," ready to retreat to his death, pronouncing, for the first time in the play, the language of his ancestors: "*Tamoussi, tamoussi*, my own gods call me back" (184). The recourse to a Kalinago word symbolizing a reentry into his original community is unexpected from this character introduced initially as an eager Christian convert and an admirer of Columbus. This older Paco, who is "cold in three languages" (179), poignantly calls upon the only language that has been absent thus far in Walcott's sub-narrative of his dispossession, the language that associates him with the native peoples of the Caribbean. In Paco's story, we see how languages can be instrumentalized and

[17] Such preoccupations are evident in such texts as "What the twilight says," "The Muse of History," and "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory."

must be wielded strategically. Yet we also see that their accumulation brings little comfort in a world where God is equated with a gold coin. Indeed, this unexpectedly tender representation of a previously ruthless colonized figure shows that even while Paco has survived through the most unfavorable circumstances, his story is easily effaced. For, as the only "protagonist" in the first half of the text that does not enter what we know of Caribbean "History," either as a hero or villain, he represents the Amerindian that has only been allowed into the master narrative of the Caribbean obliquely: first, as the stereotypical native trickster who sent explorers into lethal excursions to El Dorado; and secondly, through his fate of "extinction," repeated as a given in Caribbean histories. Amerindian, their specificity, and contributions to Caribbean social practice have been all but erased in national mythographies.[18] Like Paco with his half-visible translativity, the half-Amerindian is here recoded into a role that is historical but apolitical, unable to take action and build something new. The Amerindian's invisibility thus starkly underlies Paco's isolation, his melancholic sense of a loss of community in this moment where he is forced to pronounce his own rituals to commemorate his own death. The manipulative, savvy, and mercenary tactics that were necessary for his survival in early colonial times are represented as an initial stage in the eventual consolidation of Caribbean collectivity at the end of the play, a collectivity in which he is not represented. Walcott's drama suggests that the power of translative performativity begins with Paco, but with time, the isolation under which

[18] Melanie Newton has written in depth about the sparse and problematic representation of Amerindians in Caribbean historiography and literature in her article "Returns to a Native Land: Indigeneity and Decolonization in the Anglophone Caribbean."

he struggled under colonial materialist logics, might be mitigated by the formation of a multilingually based community.

**Alienation and Linguistic Power**

Now we turn to a different moment of Walcott's pageant, the transitional interlude before the second half of the drama where the heavily European settings and characters will be inverted into a primarily Caribbean body politic. In this short transitional scene, a (black) Barbadian house slave who works as a steward berates a drunk (white) British sailor who has demanded his help finding and returning to his ship. This new protagonist, like Paco, individually performs and transforms personhood outside of the assignment of linguistic hierarchies, but the Steward's tools have shifted into a less knowing trickster manipulation, even if it remains one that is fully colonial. At the beginning of the scene the Steward appears not to understand when the Sailor attempts to interpellate him using what he would consider effective and transparent epithets, "nigger" and "buck." Thrown off guard at being ignored, the Sailor continues less enthusiastically, having lost confidence in what he sees: "… aren't you a nigger? / I can't hardly make out complexions in this obscurity" (211).

Instead of recognizing the Sailor's summons, the Steward reverses the power enabling this racialized subjectivization by assuming an attitude of authority, bolstered by a haughty performance of standardized English, reenacting the British colonizer's attitude. Full of the moral authority that the racio-cultural ideology of British colonization has constructed, the black Steward scolds the Sailor for his inappropriate, drunken behavior. This slave here expresses complex feelings of pride, revealing an

identification with the British civilizational constructs that undergird its colonization and the enslavement of raced subjects: he calls himself "house proud," revealing his status within slavery's hierarchy as a house slave—closest to the master and furthest from the manual labor of the field hand—and his affectation is manifest in his studied, proper English. He speaks of "self-respeck" not for the self but "for [the] owner," exhibiting a fanonian alienation that reflects not only the cultural hegemony he is prey to, but the racialized ideology that accompanies it, particularly when he compares the Sailor to "these common nigger-men."[19] This same epithet that he previously ignored now functions, ironically, as he revises the conditions of this colonial hierarchy to his advantage, evacuating the word of its raced content, and turning it into an indicator of status, "common." He then berates the Sailor, who has by now been displaced from his role: "Why, you getting on like one of them convicts and indentured Englishmen that they send out to work in the colonies" and in so doing, manages to interpellate the Sailor through the lower class status that he would normally possess in metropolitan British society. Colonial society has given this Steward, through its elevation of culturally "British" behavior to justify its inequalities, the very same civilizational tools that now, inadvertently, allow him to claim and practice superiority. Because the Steward has come to see himself as British, emulating the standards of behavior to which the category has been attached, he is blind to the hierarchy's reliance on racial complexion as well, the very criteria that leaves him exposed to demands like the

[19] While the alienation Frantz Fanon describes is a distinctly post-emancipation racism, the framing of this scene, as a joke being told during an interlude of the historical action, permits an anachronistic reconstruction of a more relevant issue for the play's Federation context—a context, incidentally, coming out of a similar experience on a neighboring island to Fanon's Martinique during the same decade in which Fanon writes.

Sailor's initial summons. A situation quite apt to the British colonial ideology: in both, the pretense to gentility has managed to create unwanted black British gentlemen[20], those who are the targets of this scene's laughter.

But it must be noted that in his brazen pronouncements, the Steward's linguistic affectations fall humorously short of the Queen's English. As he forcefully commands the Sailor to change his behavior, we see (and hear) his Creole diction take over, and he demands that the Sailor not "act with respect" but "ack" with "respeck." His tirade starts with an almost unimpeachable British syntax, "If you can't ack like a gentleman in a respectable British colony, then all I could say to you is you should be ashamed of yourself," (211) but slippages start to show as he gets warmed up: "A sailor of His Majesty's navy, a Englishman, and drunk as a lord on the demon rum." The "a Englishman" instead of "an", and the "demon rum" rather than "demon's" exposes and echoes the incoherence in categories of identity that underly his claim to "self-respeck," as he appears neither embarrassed nor aware of his grammatical infractions. He continues, "And look here, too, besides, friend. I not one of these common nigger men you see working down by the carenage hauling spiders and getting on like they ain't got self-respeck for their owner, yuh!" (211). And from his dissociation from his race and the class of manual laborers, indeed, through his attribution of "self-respeck" not to the self but to the owner, and his ending with a *sound*, "yuh!" without semantic meaning other than emphasis, the absolutely entangled complexity of this simultaneously colonized and creole person becomes

[20] In *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative*, Belinda Edmondson observes that English colonialism promotes the mastery of English culture, creating local brown and black "gentlemen," all while maintaining the structures of its racial (and patriarchal) hierarchies.

visible for two things above all—the ignorance of his speech as well as its apparent power.

For, despite all the successes of colonial hegemony that are represented here, the irony of this passage lies in the way the Steward's Creole sound effectively annexes power to him. We find the Sailor, at the end of the short scene, silenced, cowed, and ultimately obedient, all despite the conventions of skin color hierarchy upon which he expected to rely. The Steward's inexplicable ability to verbally claim power, power disallowed him as a slave, occurs through his exhibition of such power across languages and beyond authenticity, through pretension, by translatively acting *beyond* his assigned part. What makes his performance so powerful is the incommensurability between a subject, his language, the racio-cultural ideologies and stratification of his society, and the unavoidable coexistence of them all—a situation that demands performance.

The Sailor never appears to understand the Steward's insults, repeating his demand almost until the very end, "Hey, you can't go off, I compel you to give me a hand" (211). Although the Steward's invective causes him to "recoil from the outburst," he does insist, now pleading a revealing shift of power, "Look, mate, it's late and I'm due aboard" (212). This time he responds to the the violent speech by adjusting the status he accords the Steward, who now merits recognition as a "mate," an equal.[21] The Steward thus fails at what he intends to signify, triggering the Sailors

[21] Gerard Aching's notion of de-masking can be useful here: "demasking may be understood as an unexpected and undesirable ideological self-recognition (the shock of self-recognition) that is brought on by contact with a masked subject" (6). The "masks" that the steward is wearing are precisely the forms of alienation whose contradiction leads to an illuminating incommensurability that transforms the sailor's own demeanor.

insistence, but he is effective through another, more immanent linguistic dynamic, a complex combination of forceful pretension (his Englishness) and a Creole sound (his Caribbeanness), a multiplicity unreadable to the Sailor. Rather unawares but far from foolish, this Steward finds power in affecting his simultaneously proper and "broken" speech, warping a social hierarchy centuries in the making.[22]

**Colonial Blindness**

The sailor's inability to read properly the Steward's language is not an isolated occurrence in *Drums and Colours'* structure of colonial dynamics. Even in this context, where the unavoidable multiplicity of language almost necessitates the flexibility of moving between them, the powerful have the option of blindness, or of ignoring difference in a refusal to grant it legitimacy. Thus, in Cadiz, the most "powerful" character presented, the Broker, along with his nephew trainee, exhibits signs of miscomprehension or ignorance on several occasions. The young nephew, a still unseasoned apprentice, seems to have a hard time processing either the language or the physical appearance of both Paco and the Jewish merchant, two non-normative characters who, although they speak his language, visibly trouble the imagined homogeneity of Catholic Europe. Despite being present for his uncle's conversation with Paco, the nephew asks, "What did he just tell you, Uncle? Who is he?" (153) to

[22] While one might suggest that the Steward is aware of his own performance's contradictions, the context of this story helps us discount this possibility. This sub-narrative, in fact, takes place in an interruption of Walcott's history, in which two of the impromptu actors come out on stage and one tells the other this story as a "joke" about a Barbadian. The story would be funny to Caribbean actors because of the regional stereotype Barbadians are most emulative of Great Britain, the island known to many as "Little Britain." Thus, the joke relies on the assumption that the Steward would genuinely be trying as hard as possible to be British, even believing himself so.

which the Broker's response constitutes an instruction in categories, origins, and paradoxical stereotypes: "He's from the islands, half cannibal, half Christian, / A pimp and a thief, but otherwise a quick worker" (153). Paco is reduced to a compilation of his parts with no name, hardly even meriting the label "half-human." The blindness continues to play out as deafness when, as the Jew prays, presenting an audible (and likely visible) expression of his ethnic otherness, the nephew again inquires, "What's he saying, Uncle?" (156). As we have already seen, the importance accorded to stereotypes, the studied and practiced inability to see Paco as anything more than a caricature, and the recognition of only the normative and homogeneous only further enables Paco's success at linguistic manipulation.

The Nephew's inquiries are perhaps revealing of an unfamiliarity with or resistance to the novelty of difference, but they appear innocent when juxtaposed with his uncle the Broker's practiced refusal to acknowledge what he does not like (which preceded, and can be read as modeling, the Nephew's mimicking performances of miscomprehension). When the Broker reads what he assumes is his Nephew's unmerchantly handwriting, he exclaims "I can't make out this scholarly scrawl, what the hell is this?" (151) to which the latter replies "It's your handwriting, Uncle." The Broker manages to easily continue reading, blaming his eyes. The intolerance of any degree of difference, even if imagined, as well as the necessity of schooling the nephew into such an attitude, reveals an exercise where meaning is not in the sign, but in the practice of position, power, and scorn—the performance of the broker's own sense of his agency as a Christian European merchant. In blaming his eyes, we see revealed through the broker a form of reading that is tautological—he only sees what

he expects already. The possibility of reading as a scholarly enterprise leading to knowledge is refused, even if meaning through the transparency of the writing was easily achieved; the potentially unknown or unfamiliar, leading to a likely transcendence of difference, stands in the way of the logics of money, power, and authority. What is refused, in the same gesture, is the acknowledgment of potential interlocutors among the visibly different, with whom direct conversation would have required a hospitable attitude towards translation. Instead, their marked and remarkable differences present a dangerous threat to the monolingual, monocultural homogeneity that is usually understood to undergird community. At this moment of the play, the time is still that of the colonizers, the time of Berrio and Raleigh seeing only an opaque El Dorado, and there is as yet no room for a community formed in discursive communion over a surplus of language.

In theorizing the assertion of difference, of visible and unavoidable specificity as a linguistic resistance to domination, the trickster epistemology only takes us as far as the conscious exercise of agency it implies. Consider that even if a city of gold was a European fantasy, the great stores of gold in Guyana were actually no invention. The Indians' negotiations around a European story may have been fabricated with an intent to deceive, or it may have been cooperative confirmation of those aspects the Indians knew to be true. As each episode of translative discourse in the text unfolds, it becomes clear that multilingual performance, which embellishes upon and exceeds the standard idiom and its participation in a system of values that maintains the social order, happens both through the strategic manipulation of language and through the less conscious reversals of hierarchy that occur without premeditation and, at times,

without the actor's complete awareness of his power, as with the powerful speech of the deeply alienated Steward. In each case, however, the possession of a linguistic duality or multiplicity, the condition of translative flux, is seen as engendering subtle supremacy over the linguistically poor, monolingual speakers, as wielding an inevitable advantage over the static monolingual norm. This linguistic performance and its power, even when not emerging from an intention to subversion, is the common precondition for effective self-expression in the scenarios we witness, and it does so by imposing its difference, while refusing standardization and monolingualism and disobeying the despotism of hegemonic colonial power.[23] Juxtaposing instances of both the intentional and the more passive linguistic performativity of multilingual expression, these readings attempt to locate the specific power that Walcott places outside the mechanisms of agency, an opaque but translative means to decolonization.

**The Newly (Post) Colonial Performativity**

The last four scenes of Walcott's drama represents a maroon uprising which comes across rather as a comedy of errors. Yet nothing is arbitrary, even if everything is easily read as jest. The guerillas accept not only Africans, but also East Indian and Chinese men, and even a white (former) planter.[24] The rebel leader flippantly makes

[23] Despotism figures significantly in Arendt's discussion of the political, as the result of a non-pluralistic, non-vulnerable form of participation, where pluralism and vulnerability are understood to be invaluable to construction of the public sphere through which people can act politically.

[24] There is one woman as well, Yette, which raises very pertinent questions—also very common ones—as to the patriarchal structures that are reinforced in Walcott's oeuvre. Yette is herself an ambiguously black woman, a former slave, who was a bedmate of her former master, collapsing various problematic determinations of oversexualized black or mulatto women into the only female represented in this collective. Indeed, one question worth asking here is how this particular conception of political action might be modified through a broader inclusion of non-stereotypical female figures and other non-

everyone a General, a grandiose granting of "equal powers." There are different vocations—cook, tactician, preacher, planter—but these skills do not translate into strategic or meaningful roles for warfare and rebellion. Food is more important than the "struggle," as one rebel delays battle for it: "You ain't too mind if we eat a little food first" (268). Cause and effect, money and profiteering, the logic of the opportunistic, indeed of coloniality—as it has been illustrated through Paco and those surrounding him—is thrown out. In this scene, dispossession becomes the logic of collectivization, even as people have nothing to share but their (post)colonial condition and its way with words. The dialogue here is crowded with a more contemporary Creole, sporadically opaque with its improvised, exaggerated, excess words like "everythingist," "nowherian" (288), and "poorakey" (292).

The focus, now, is that of a collective, but its logic is unusual. Eating, strategizing, and sharing space together, all the fighters have distinct concerns and voices. Coming out of very different individual stories, this motley crew of characters have found each other and stay together in a comically ill-fated enactment of what would historically have been a serious and dangerous rebellion. Their haphazard solidarity is expressed through a continuous speaking, interrupting, and sometimes monologuing, their frequent recourse to action and speech leaving little unsaid but participating in no unified ideology. The façade separating actor from character and people from hero is punctured and the boundaries blurred, so that the frame story of a Carnival that was interrupted to form a play seeps back into the picture. Performance, and the enactment of explicit political action, is also a frivolous role-playing in

---

gender-normative characters. This is taken up in my work on Maryse Condé in the third chapter of this dissertation.

rebellion and legislative politics—the limit point of Arendt's serious "action." As one former masquerader switches roles from slave to General for this new scene, we are made to witness how political status can profoundly yet precipitously be changed in the upheaval of decolonization. That impossible but carnivalesque upheaval contains within it the "action" that in fact exceeds the goal or ideal, proving the previously questionably legitimacy of the actor involved through nothing more than his performance of it. The haphazard and unpredictable (words that describe the Arendtian political arena) bring together the cultural practice of Carnival masking and the new drama of autonomous nationhood where each person is given the part of self-determination. This latter role is new, but performance, an old habit learned and perfected across colonial history, can be recognized as the mode through which this part becomes playable. In this moment, the human vocation of self-determination—the enlightenment view that informs Arendt's theorizations—comes head to head with the exposure of its growing pains. For this newly liberated political entity, self-determination might only be able to take form as a dramatic act.

In the following scene, we notice the persistent refusal to seek meaning in dialogue—the basic means to intelligibility for a reader of this theatre script. In this ultimate episode of the Caribbean "epic," our "actors" continue to exaggerate, improvise, and engage with sound and rhythm in the form and language most appropriate to them, but they enter into a privileged and non-conflictual communion of creolized language amongst themselves, a context in which the combative and manipulative strategies of Paco and the Steward's historical heterolingualism give way to an individual exercise of authority over the tongue—indeed, there is no hierarchy or

wealth for which to compete. In this scene where Pompey and the ruined planter Calico join the rest of the rebellion, each person acts and speaks incessantly for himself:

> MANO. What's your Christian name, and what make you fight for the cause of emancipation and constitutional progress?
>
> POMPEY. You never heard of me?
>
> RAM. You is a soldier?
>
> POMPEY. I is a calypsoldier. I bugles, I incites violence, I tread the burning zones of Arabia. I was a meek and mild nigger, a pacific man, but now…
>
> MANO. All right, all right, and you, Mr. Calico, hand over the coin to the auditor, General Ram. Yette, you see anything gal?
>
> CALICO. General this is an ancestral heirloom, my great-grandfather found it and died with it as Jeremy Ford when he searched for Guiana with Sir Walter Raleigh.
>
> MANO (*Shouting impatiently*). Well, ain't it an Indian you giving it to, and ain't it an Indian them did want it from? Boy, pass the subscription before I chop off your brains.
>
> YU. Food cook will please sit and serve. I will stand watch.
>
> POMPEY. Inform me of my duties and watch me charge the foe.
>
> MANO. You ent too mind if we eat a little food first. Now you, what you want?
>
> (*They sit to eat*. YU *passes plates of food around*.)

CALICO. General, the bottom fell out of the sugar market, but more than that economic fact, I was pursuing your career with interest. I hear how you have developed an army of free men. You could shoot me if you need to, but since the hand of ruin withered my crops, poverty has taught me compassion.

MANO. Friend Calico, nobody hate nobody here. I know what concern you have for the land, and you may have a proprietary right, for all I know, as you was here first…

CALICO. Yes, but I didn't care sufficient about those who worked it.

MANO. I say it don't matter, sometimes the times so bad a man don't have time to think properly. Now ladle out a soup for yourself.

CALICO. I don't like Chinese food.

MANO. Well, that's all we have here, so you best swallow your pride

YU (*Rushing at* CALICO): You don't like Chinese food? A smashed head brings wisdom.

MANO. Don't attack the man, General Yu, he don't mean no wrong. Pompey, how about you?

POMPEY (*Waving his musket*). War! To war! They holding us in the chains of bondage, and I doesn't eat dead flesh with mortal men. Oh God, they beat poor Pompey with the rod of correction, and they cast me and my people in a dungeon with the lizard and the involved serpent.

YETTE. Hear he. Good robber talk, Pomps. (267-270)

Mano, invested in his role as rebel leader, is all business, recording information, creating strategy, and foregrounding mission. Pompey, on the other hand, full of the warrior part he is about to play, bypasses Mano's seemingly formulaic questions and shifts the subject to his own role and apparent notoriety. Ram, who has been identified (other than as "coolie" and Indian)[25] only as a "tactician" and thus inseparable from his role in the army, can only conceive that Pompey's claim to recognition would be from an identity in which he shared, as "soldier." Pompey seizes the opportunity of Ram's question to begin his "calypsoldier" performance, riffing off Ram's question to launch the bombastic recitation he seems to have prepared: "I is a calypsoldier..."

Pompey's Midnight Robber Carnival role that Yette later identifies is here resplendent in its verbal force, its rhythm and fear-inducing imagery, its invocation of the musical political critique of the calypso form. Carol Martin's "Carnival Glossary" describes the Midnight Robber:

> A traditional Carnival character who accosts spectators with an audacious barrage of slang and double talk aimed at getting them to give up their cash. Midnight Robber's speech—his robber talk—is dangerous, bombastic, and boastful. He brags about the strength of his villainy, his murders of millions. Often the Robber is avenging wrongs done to his family generations ago. The Midnight Robber's costume includes a whistle to announce himself, frilly trousers, an embroidered shirt, a cape, a fake gun or dagger, and a huge

[25] This is worth noting, even in a work that would initiate a nationhood of multiculturalism, as it is the Indian and Chinese who are maintained in rather stereotypical representations of their ethnic groups. The white man certainly is marked as well, as the colonizer, but all the other "unmarked" characters are assumed to be some version of "black" or "creole," with characters of African descent receiving no stereotyped or culture-specific part.

> brimmed hat usually adorned with items depicting the theme of the Robber's speech for that year. A coffin often appears on either the Robber's hat or shoes. The Robber can be dressed fully in black, or he may dress as a Fancy Robber wearing an excess of decorations." (229)

Martin describes the Midnight Robber's "repartee", or "robbertalk" as "his most powerful weapon and defense" (232). It is certainly not surprising, given this pedigree, that Pompey's tirade should be the prelude to his engagement in battle. Yet, it is also worth noting, as Errol Hill explains, that, unlike their assumed predecessors "the Pierrots… who engaged in verbal battles before exchanging blows…, the Midnight Robbers do not fight and seldom converse with each other. Their speeches are monologues rattled off at prospective victims who are harangued until they pay a ransom to secure their release" (91). We easily see in Pompey's "performance" a confirmation of this verbal rather than physical aggression, as his enthusiasm for battle eventually takes no victims and does little more than get him shot. Rather more powerful, however, is the performative force in the language and in the masked exaggeration, a rapid and loud speech that deliberately avoids transparency but that, like the Steward's, incorporates a certain discursive power in its unabashed frills and excesses. That Yette recognizes the robbertalk form of Pompey's intervention validates him and gives it name so that he can continue to play his part, but it is worth noting that she does not enter into dialogue or debate with it, despite the excess of language it uses. And this, after all, is the extent of the power proffered by this type of performance, as the Midnight Robber desires nothing more, with his toy weapons, than the acknowledgment of a few coins through which the victim plays out the part of

conquered enemy. The robber's validity lies in his ability to achieve visibility, and to demand recognition.

The conversation continues to be readable as interruptive: a shared and communal but still individually focused kind of expression. Indifferent to the details of Pompey's speech, Mano wants to return to his task of gathering bounty for the rebels, while Calico is more interested in his ancestry and pays no mind to Mano's desires. Furthermore, he interrupts Mano's attempt to communicate with Yette about her observations while on duty, "You see anything?" a question that is not revisited until after several other interruptions. Mano loses patience at Calico's persistent complaints, occasionally accepting his claims but refuting their validity. However, despite his outburst of impatience marked by an exaggerated threat of violence, ("pass the subscription before I chop off your brains"), he is later not invested in fighting him, as he restrains Yu when the Chinese man, offended, attempts to attack the former planter—in this case, it is someone else's validity being defended, and his interest in Calico does not go far enough for even his frustration to last. Yu's attack actually follows several other interruptions: Yu's announcement that food was ready, Pompey's disregarding the announcement to proclaim his own zeal for battle, Mano's reception of that request by stating his own desire to eat first. Interestingly, even though he asks if "you ain't too mind," he does not *ask*, leaving out the question mark to make the inquiry a statement even as it acknowledges Mano's eagerness—it does not seek input. As Calico again ignores the communal breaking of bread to speak self-absorbedly of his past, his refusal to eat and his denigration of "Chinese food" shows deliberate misrecognition of the Chinese cook, and this lack of recognition is censored

in Yu's angry charge against him. Mano again acknowledges each participant, addressing Yu while he advises patience towards Calico, but also instructing the latter to "swallow his pride." Finally, as Pompey gets separately worked up and angry in his final monologue in this selection, apparently disconnected from all that had been happening around him, Yette only summarily appraises and validates his speech before proceeding to finally address Mano's long-delayed question about the "news in the country" (270).

The people in this budding community recognize each other's verbal detours, but linger little on penetrating and directly answering them. Even Mano's declaration about history, meant to calm Calico, is superficial and rife with untruth—its declarations about the white man's potential right to the land, as well as his topical dismissal of his colonial wrongs, are deliberately nonsensical and problematic, raising doubts as to Mano's appropriateness as rebel leader, but even more, as self-determining citizen of this new collectivity. Indeed, in the idealized denouement of the political theatre that Walcott has here presented as a performative challenge, in this culmination of the four hundred years of history represented in the play, is a people that is expressive but not always committed to collectivity, nor very well informed. The attempt to logically decipher intention, weighty meaning, or moral value in the self-indulgent outbursts of each character's monologue, reflecting little more than self-interest, leads to disappointment. The easy assignment of agency and resistance to a "rebellion" such as this would be a misreading, or an imposition. Nonetheless, in the strange balance of their sequenced and self-absorbed interruptions, of each example of unabashed self-expression before the community to which each finds himself present,

a distinct model of powerful, performative language is being sketched. The power it carries lies in the compulsion to act and speak continuously and repeatedly, to wait out interruptions and to interrupt with one's own energetic contribution, to receive an interlocutor's words and to transform them—as with Pompey's shift from "soldier" to "calypsoldier"—to one's own discursive intentions. Rather than a consciously directed resistance to hierarchy, there is, more fundamentally, the practice of the power to act and speak of one's own volition, perhaps selfishly but not in isolation (as the treachery and greed of coloniality demanded of Paco), but, for the first time, as part of a collectivity. In *Drums and Colours*, the epic that would narrate, initiate and imagine a new autonomous community, the compulsion to act—to perform—embedded in the linguistic negotiation that characterized the entire production, must continue to incorporate the multiple voices insistently but also patiently asserting and interrupting until they can be heard, recognized, and validated.

In Walcott, differences are not made to fully dissolve one into the other (or into a smooth callaloo, the local dish that Yu prepares and that is metaphorically used to represent creoleness). By carefully elaborating the contrast, we see the punctuated interruption and juxtaposition of one to the other, as well as the ongoing, productive, conflictual translativity this implies in the myriad Carnival inversions it stages.

In this chapter, working in the interstices of the languages of coloniality and decolonization, rather than looking at how language and culture in the Caribbean might be integrated and "pass" as unified, I have focused instead on forms of linguistic differentiation that function as performance, because they rely on the complexity of their voices in order to enact power. Thinking literature as a way to also think

languages in the plural poetically, we can also see how, in linguistic multiplicity, the interaction of languages in a text can be simultaneously combative and performative in mode, yet create room for coexistence. In doing so, I would like to propose the text of this drama, as the forum for this linguistic dialogue, to be a vital "public realm" for an active and unpredictable negotiation between languages, as per Arendt's formula for political potential. Their interaction is translative, undergoing a political, poetic negotiation to produce a literary discourse that stages authority, legitimacy, and power as forces both inherent to and contested through the process of creation.

**Conclusion**

The West Indies Federation, which was the initiation of a new political body that would enter into contact with others in the world, was also the initiation of a new grounds for individual political action. The Festival of the Arts, in which Drums and Colours was performed, celebrated the first legislative meeting of the Federation, where space was newly given to free men to (re)present themselves before each other in the democratic expression of political activity. Liberated from the paternalist administration of colonial governance, the parliamentary body here being actualized opens up the unpredictable space of participatory politics. This unpredictable, Arendt states, is an essential aspect of action, and frees it from the restrictions of activity that is justified only by its ends, and that results in a logic of despotism. The gamble being taken in this haphazard attempt to make a single political body of these islands, separated by sea, history, culture, but also joined by these and by language(s), can happen only in engagement with the unpredictable. *Drums and Colors* attends to this

unpredictable "frailty" of the new Federation by holding onto what Arendt calls "true plurality," namely "the purposeful combination of different skills and callings" (212). The "calling" of different Caribbean sites, such as Haitian revolution, Jamaican rebellion, Trinidadian masquerade and Guyanese gold, and even the joke of Barbadian snobbism, produces Walcott's decentralized and de-idealized collective history, one that points to not only differences, but also to the spectral presences that do not participate, namely Haiti and Guyana. The play explicitly relies on a plurality described both ethnically and vocationally, constituting its rebel band of "a Chinese cook, an East Indian tactician… a preacher and a ruined planter" (16.267), and in all their persistent and unabashed voices. But it also goes beyond Arendt's high-minded politics, acting, in Carnival excess, to mimic and performatively give the lie to idealized pluralism.

In the final scenes of Walcott's epic play, a shared Creole diction provides the collective glue for the loose organization of the various members of the rebel band. The philosophy of a linguistic community is traditionally contained in its active and irreducible use of common language. However, we return to the heterolingual address, where Naoki Sakai rejects "communication" as the conceivable result of expression:

> The heterolingual address does not abide by the normalcy of reciprocal and transparent communication, but instead assumes that every utterance can fail to communicate because heterogeneity is inherent in any medium, linguistic or otherwise. Every translation calls for a countertranslation, and in this sort of address it is clearly evident that

> within the framework of communication, translation must be endless. (33)

Against a *homolingual* address, where the speaker expects to be comprehensible and transparent to the recipient(s), it is the initial outlook of the speaker in the heterolingual address that makes a difference. Sakai undoes the very logic of linguistic transparency: when "heterogeneity is inherent in any medium," hierarchies that validate clarity fall apart, and an engagement with the possibilities of communicative failure can begin, as in the interruptive and selfish pronouncements of each member of the rebel band. Walcott's conclusion provides an imaginative engagement with the kind of active communication Sakai advocates in the necessary "countertranslation" he describes. In the end, in *Drums and Colours*, comprehension is not the goal of language, but self-presentation is. What is signified, more than communication, is a "laisser-parler" attitude towards speech, its continued performance as the practice of freedom. Speech, then, always carries meaning, but only inasmuch as it brings people before and to the attention of each other.

# CHAPTER 2

# "WE COUNTRY": MONCHOACHI'S POETICS OF LAND AND LANGUAGE

## Introduction

Monchoachi, the pen name of André Pierre-Louis, carries performance nominally, but his poetry is not easily read for the exhibitive juxtapositions and collisions of language that mark Walcott's *Drums and Colours*, and other Caribbean texts that feature Creole. Performance as linguistic exhibitionism works against his poetics, which insists, both through his essays and through his verse, on an ethics of "retenue" ("restraint"). This is particularly true when juxtaposed with the more prominent Créolistes, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, both Martinican compatriots whose playful incorporation of Creole and orality into written text in French easily exhibits Antillean specificity and a creole identity. Monchoachi's more measured poetics instead foregrounds an ecological understanding of C/creole specificity, through a dialectical engagement with Amerindian cosmologies that privilege a relationship with the earth, and through sustained work with the multiplicity of languages that inform thought and culture in the region. Yet, the way he negotiates linguistic multiplicity, I argue, is nonetheless deeply engaged with performance, as it reincorporates modes of Creole orality into written poetry, and as it offers a new theory of embodied performance (*zhaï*) historically and politically engendered by his postcolonial Caribbean.

The intention to identify a Caribbean cultural mode of performance, a potentially reductive and essentializing exercise, renders this seeming "uncovering" of

Monchoachi's poetic performativity suspect. Why insist on performance in a text that lends itself to an analysis of the subtle and pensive rather than flamboyant exhibition? Performance in Monchoachi's work, which I will define through readings of his poetry, and through essays "Un *zhaï*" ("A Zhaï"), "Se laisser dire ("Let Yourself be Told"), "*Nha caéra, rété,* habiter" ("*Nha Caéra, Rété,* to Live"), "Le pays nous" ("We Country"), and "La case où se tient la lune" (The House Where the Moon Stays) is closely linked to a rather novel and compelling model of community-formation: the elaboration of the specificity and value of Antillean ways of being through the very materiality of language.[1] Language, and in particular, the rhythm, sound, and stamina of oral language, contains more than just the sign for community, it also produces it, all while creating the conditions for that community to enter into and participate in the world. In this sense, Monchoachi's community shares much with the Arendtian "Action," theorized in my discussion of Walcott's *Drums and Colours*, as its emphasis on embodied speech helps conceptualize a form of participatory politics as attempted by the the formerly colonized. However, *Drums and Colours'* Arendtian insistence on the individual, on a self-actualizing specificity of one person within a heterolingual and heterogeneous community, is elided in Monchoachi's project, which insists on its difference from Western philosophy's emphasis on the individual to the detriment of the people. Monchoachi's difference is appropriate to his context, where the absence of an independent political status for Martinique leaves a grey area where a de facto community might have stood, requiring instead a renewed and renewing perspective

[1] In this and other chapters that focus primarily on the French Caribbean, I use the term privileged in those lands for the Caribbean, "les Antilles," as well as for related words, "Antillean." I generally use Caribbean when expanding the discussion to the greater, not exclusively French-speaking Caribbean.

and strategy towards claiming collectivity and practicing autonomy (even if just creatively) from France. Monchoachi's writing thus tends towards reinforcing collective solidarity as a response to the absence of a defined and recognized political status.

In a theorization of performance as it appears in Monchoachi's poetic philosophy, this chapter will interrogate the prominent understanding for Caribbeanness in the Antilles, the ideology of the Créolistes with its prescriptive formulas for Caribbean expression. I will present Monchoachi's particular contribution to Caribbean thought as a performance that reinforces geographical and spiritual specificity and creates a communal possibility of political action. What this work seeks to avoid, however, is the performance of essences that evacuate any political subjectivity, desire, or action on the part of the Caribbean people. Monchoachi stages a complex performance through language that turns the body into a signifying object which, in conjunction with all the historically and politically laden implications of speech, language, and voice for the postcolonial and contemporary Caribbean, produces a form of expression and self-determination that is re-anchored in place, history, and context, and that is far from easily reducible to the knowable yet indecipherable.

Monchoachi positions himself strongly in contradistinction to the "tout-monde" philosophy of "relation" of his compatriot Edouard Glissant, an important influence for the Créolistes Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. Glissant's work insists on a strategic and protective opacity in Creole language, an effect of its origins in the plantation and in slavery (*Caribbean Discourse* 120-129). In contrast,

part of the specificity of Monchoachi's writing is that it uses translation to repetitively exhibit, reinforce, and render *readable* local linguistic and cultural difference (always through language). Using the French for its vehicular possibility, he subordinates it to the Creole language that is being "exposed," so that the place and cultural practice that the latter represents is shown to be (in)valuable, philosophically valid and even superior, and ethically ideal.[2] This Creole specificity, as Monchoachi explores it, is one that is both split, in its postcoloniality and modernity, and whole, in its conceptual depth—it carries the legacies of an Amerindian worldview as well as an African diasporic inheritance, all as it lives the performative duality that the postcolonial condition requires. Monchoachi's method, which uses French to unveil Creole, relies on an ongoing relationality, a frictional continuity of contact between the two languages. His postcolonial poetics, then, explores a grounded hybridity that is enriched, rather than rendered schizophrenically mimic, by its past of postcolonial alienation.

**How Creole Enters the World: Language, *Créolité,* and Monchoachi**

Monchoachi's work, poetry and non-fiction alike, invariably reveals the poet's preoccupation with language, not only as the material of his craft, but as the object of a vital philosophical meditation. His almost piously speaks of language as the entry into peoples' realities, as the beginning of the world for any human community, an

[2] Monchoachi's approach to thinking Creole can nonetheless be seen as an extension of Glissant's thought which, even as it describes Creole's vocation to opacity, suggests that this eventually becomes part of the weakness of Creole, the reason for its "forced poetics," which limits its possibility for development and continued growth. Monchoachi's work answers Glissant's pessimism towards Creole by showing the rich theoretical possibility of Creole as it is.

idea that is repeated and reworked time and again in his poetry and in his dense, lyrical essays. A schematic review of his linguistic choices reveals that he published poetry only in Creole initially, later bilingually with *Nostrom* and *Mantèg*, and finally primarily in French, a French "worked by" Creole, but in which he continues to foreground the specific value of Creole language and creole expressive practice (Interview). I will explore the politics of language in Antillean writing, comparing Monchoachi's specificity vis-a-vis the Créoliste approach, before demonstrating the effects of his bilingual poetics by recounting the experience of reading *Nostrom,* a bilingual poem published with facing French and Creole versions, where a poetics of reaffirmation and assertion becomes performatively visible.

A translativeness in Creole-French Antillean writing, in particular from Martinique, is far from specific to Monchoachi, and is perhaps more exhibitive in the work of Créolistes Chamoiseau and Confiant, who write relationally between Creole and French. These writers infuse their French texts with Creole words, interrupt them with excerpts of Creole songs, or render dialogues in a creolized French. Sometimes they chance an untranslated Creole interjection, and the narrator's voice frequently adopts Creole idiomatic or syntactic nuance. In conversation with, and in loose manifestation of their Créoliste manifesto written with Jean Bernabé, *Éloge de la Créolité* ("*In Praise of Creoleness"*), which expressly presents a strategy towards creating a "Caribbean" literature, Chamoiseau and Confiant's writings have eventually consolidated around a French that features Creole—as tone, dialogue, proverbs, or as

sporadic diversions into Creole words.[3] Their literary approach to representation within the Antillean experience of a diglossic hierarchy, with French as the language of socio-economic and cultural power, and Creole that of orality, popular expression, and the disenfranchised folk, consolidates an Antillean aesthetic of compromise by culturally validating Creole without sacrificing the dominant French, language of education, History, development, and of literary circulation.

It bears noting that, in important ways, Monchoachi's dedication to the reclamation of a Creole language aesthetics is shared by the Créolistes in contrast to whom I will be largely reading him. It is not uncommon to find Monchoachi listed among adherents of the *créolité* movement in various accounts of it, and his pioneering work in Creole, along with writers such as Sonny Rupaire, Gilbert Gratiant, Joby Bernabé, etc., has been cited by the Créolistes themselves as a model upon which they want to build. Confiant's dictionary of Creole language cites Monchoachi's poetry extensively for contextual examples, and Monchoachi himself has expressed no disagreement with this project to promote and reinforce Creole language use (Interview). Indeed, part of the weakness of this dissertation remains its inability to incorporate analysis of those many Creole texts that Monchoachi made his priority in an earlier moment of his career, a moment that was marked by a distinctly more political poetics of dissidence that was greatly influenced by Marxist thought. However, by no means does the juxtaposition of Monchoachi's more explicitly political period with the Créolistes' intervention intend to equate the investments of

[3] Although the *Éloge de la créolité* has been published in a bilingual addition which I will be referencing here for the French text, I have chosen to provide my own translations into English, which is the case throughout this dissertation.

their project with his: *créolité*, we shall see, explicitly refuses rebellion and dissidence, while the most recent incarnations of Monchoachi's work are persistently political. His strategies, on the other hand, have shifted: while his baptism in Marxism still marks his thought, our analysis of his essay "Le pays nous" later in this chapter will show how the relationality with French, present now in most of his writing, and the unmistakeable direction of his linguistic choices towards a primarily French oeuvre and a hospitable multilingual philosophy that incorporates Greek and Sanskrit among other written and oral languages, presents a new perspective on the strategies necessary to foregrounding and valorizing a Creole aesthetics and philosophy.[4] In particular, in his strategy of translative performance, Monchoachi renders language, alternatively inaccessible and open, expressive of a mode of political intention and action that connects with a disjunctive political history, a political hybridity, and a form of (cultural and political) autonomy specific to the Antillean space he is interested in.

As expressed in their *Éloge de la créolité*, one of the Créolistes' greatest objectives is to "comprendre ce qu'est l'Antillais" ("what the Antillean is") and to "embrasser cette dimension américaine, notre espace au monde" ("embrace this American dimension, our space in the world"; 22). This is a focus on place and on a sustained engagement with Antillean specificity that is shared by Monchoachi, and that shapes his persistent explications of Creole language concepts and practice; his

[4] The shift in Monchoachi's strategy, and perhaps, philosophy, might be juxtaposed with Glissant's own strategic shift from the decolonizing nationalist perspective to one that reflects the departmentalized status of Martinique, and the impossibility of conceptualizing independence without first developing the resources that are necessary for functioning independently. In exchange for this capitulation of the urgency of independence, in both cases, cultural autonomy is sought.

recourse to a creole practice of orality as the aesthetic base and subject of his work; and his engagement with creole spiritual practices and with Amerindian legacies. While Monchoachi would not so easily employ the notion of "authenticity" that the Créolistes explicitly seek, their basic quest for a literary project grounded in the Antilles is shared. Even more broadly, in the "American space" they invoke, which in many ways describes Monchoachi's Amerindian cosmology even better than "Antillean," we recognize the shared investment in an ecological aspect to any Antillean literary project. It is notable, however, that while the Créolistes describe the need to "appréhender cette civilisation antillaise dans son espace américain" ("understand this Antillean civilization within its American space"; 22), at this point of their argument, their focus is less on the notion of *créolité* that would define their literary project, and more on the Antillean civilization: the Créolistes would later clarify that their notions of "Americanness" are distinct from "*créolité*" which, itself, would be distinct from "Antillean" (29-33). In a careful expansion of the geographical base to which their project could theoretically apply, they set up the comparative idealization of *créolité* that is valorized precisely because it has not, in their estimation, been generalized in the Caribbean or the Americans. Its logic is thus based in the possibility of exceptionalism, and it is defined by an inherent, essential, and depoliticized specificity. *Créolité,* then, although starting from a geographical situatedness, gradually attains to a delocalized idealization of its abstract vision, an idealization to which the other locations within its geography have only the potential of being arbitrarily included.[5]

[5] The arbitrary here, however, is easily revealed to be rather predictably based on spaces of creolization

Perhaps an obvious but nonetheless important point of proximity between Monchoachi and the Créolistes is the shared vocation of a literary approach to reinforcing Antillean cultural heritage. Even as the Créolistes suggest that "art" generally should be the privileged domain for imagining and projecting *créolité*, their emphases remain with the literary text, which is metonymically made to represent art more broadly: "Seule la connaissance poétique, la connaissance romanesque, la connaissance littéraire, bref, la connaissance artistique, pourra nous déceler" ("Only poetic knowledge, novelistic knowledge, literary knowledge, in short, artistic knowledge, can reveal us"; 38). Their concern is "notre écriture" 'our writing' (40), the ultimate subject of their explorations of this "art," and the magnification of Creole language as the source of their identitarian and ideological category (*créolité*), lends itself specifically to literary creation. For this reason, only writers comprise the models promoted by the Créolistes. Later in my reading of Monchoachi, however, I will note his distinct take on the ethics of creation, or on "literature" itself as a privileged medium.

Like the Créolistes, Monchoachi also does not choose between French and Creole, but his decision to work in both is distinct from theirs: his poetics claims each language differently, and it does not consider compromise, choosing instead a method that can best be described as revelation—uncovering an worldview and philosophy that is contained in Creole language, made visible through juxtaposition with, or explication by, the vehicular French language. He also complicates the linguistic binary, expanding the range of linguistic choices through extensive forays into

---

as they understand the concept: they find it easier to include most French spaces in the Indian Ocean than other Caribbean spaces in the "Americas."

Amerindian language. While the Créolistes have eschewed what they call an "externalizing" perspective in the Antilles that relies on originary (read, not Creole) forms and practices for literary inspiration, rejecting, for example, Césaire's Négritude movement that was too African (external) for their tastes, Monchoachi is himself quite invested in recuperating lost traditions, especially the Amerindian, an "origin" defined as such not because of genealogical racialized roots, but because of its role as geographical forebears who shared and bequeathed an attitude of equity in the relationship of humans to their Antillean space. The relevance of the indigenous peoples of the Antilles to Chamoiseau and Confiant's *créolité* has been ambiguous at best, the Créolistes evading Amerindian influence by representing them as exterminated, as locatable only in artifacts and relics.[6] Yet Monchoachi's invocation of a neglected indigenous epistemology uncovers an unexplored affinity between Amerindian ways of knowing and being and Creole ones, an affinity he unpacks entirely by probing language: the heretofore ignored Kalinago (Carib) language as well as other neglected regional languages such as the Aluku language of French Guyanese maroons. Amerindian epistemologies are made visible and manifest as they are revealed to be persistent and living. Most importantly, unlike the stated dismissal of all-but-Creole by the Créolistes, where Creole means the "magma" of irrecoverable origins now molten together into one culture, Monchoachi embraces the possible conjunctions between Creole language and its forebears in Caribbean space, exploring, between the two, and through an exegesis in French, the great possibility of a hybrid Creole-Amerindian Caribbeanness that foregrounds the relationship between people

[6] See, for example, "La roche écrite," the first chapter of Chamoiseau and Confiant's *Lettres créoles: tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature, 1635-1975.*

and the earth, the earth figuring as the primordial source of their relation. By reincorporating the Amerindians into his thought, Monchoachi reveals that this focus on one kind of "origin" is far from externalizing, but rather more geographically internalizing than the Créoliste's own outward-looking attention to the "tout-monde" 'all-world' that they borrow from Glissant. The "terre" 'world' / 'earth' that he seeks to relate to is no broader than the located earth of his Antillean home. It is from this earth and the needs and also ideas that it engenders that he would begin looking outwards to other linguistic traditions that might nourish his Creole thought.

The Créoliste project is, according to the *Éloge de la créolité,* an "archeological" project (22), one that benefits from the "lucioles éparses" 'scattered fireflies' of the "précieux conservateurs… des pierres, des statues brisées, des poteries défaites, des dessins égarés, des silhouettes déformées: de cette ville ruinée qu'est notre fondement" ("precious keepers… of stones, of broken statues, of pieces of pottery, of lost drawings, of misshapen silhouettes: of this ruined city that is our foundation"; 17). The "précieux conservateurs" 'precious keepers' are those writers in Creole language who preceded the Créolistes and preserved what, to them, constitutes a cultural patrimony that has been abandoned and has been buried, awaiting their "fouille archéologique" 'archeological dig' (22). The reification of Creole as an ancient and lost art of expression even takes the form of the "hieroglyphs," which is how Glissant's Creole language theorizations appeared to them. Thus, the task of the Créolistes is urgent, one that must subvert a linguistic death by resurrecting "du lexique, des tournures, des proverbes, de la mentalité, de la sensibilité, en un mot, de l'intelligence de cette entité culturelle dans laquelle nous tentons aujourd'hui une

plongée salutaire" ("the vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, the mentality, the sensibility, in a word, the intelligence of this cultural entity into which, today, we are attempting a life-saving plunge"; 16). In short, a life-giving and life-preserving project to rescue what has already died, and what cannot be allowed to continue being buried.

Monchoachi's engagement with language has no such archeological perspective towards linguistic fragments; instead, his engagements with Creole in his essays, incantatory and rhythmic, evoke a language that lives, in present tense: "We, creolophones, have the practice of…", or "Creole says…" ("Se laisser" 37). The importance that Creole language is given, in Monchoachi's notion of its continuity, carries always the double possibility of performance, while the Creole interruptions as "archeological" language via the Créolistes present instead a static incursion in an otherwise living (French) text. If Monchoachi seeks to avoid the loss of any aspect of creole culture, it is not in the salvaged lexicon or proverbs (which, if he uses them, he uses easily as an part of present practice),[7] but in the greater perspective of *parole* '*the word*' and orality, and in particular, in the perspective of the restitution of the relationship of speech or language to the body. As such, his focus on rhythm, his enactment of repetition, and his unfurling revelation of Creole language is a performance of its ideal, living, complex and complete self, as it goes for a walk and

[7] It might be worth noting that the prose fiction of the Créolistes tends towards the historical, a narration that relies on the past or constructions of it, while Monchoachi's preferred poetic form allows an engagement, reproduced in the act of reading, with Creole in the present. Whatever traditional stylistic mechanisms enter into his poetry becomes reactivated as part of a performative act, rather than the replacement of creoleness into a nostalgic or historical narrative with a clear temporality.

encounters the earth in "Se laisser dire," as it explores desire in mating rituals in "Un *zhaï*," as it channels protest in angry critique in "Le Pays nous."

The Créolistes evacuate the political by pronouncing the time of "screams" and "denunciations" to be past (21). This places them squarely in opposition to Monchoachi's subtle but persistent critique of the violence, dispossession, greed, and individualization of first colonial, later neo-colonial Western practices. Even while he uses French, even while he works towards an expanded and visible recognition of Creole, Monchoachi does not refrain from anti-European critique. Furthermore, his theorization of a Caribbean specificity through Amerindian and creole space and practice is no mere reaction against the West, nor is it problematically "externalizing," as the Créolistes assume all moments of decolonization discourse must be.

The displacement of the terms of the Créolistes' project into a scientific domain of research, investigation, and knowledge accumulation, with its focus on archeology, is taken further with the overwhelming enlightenment imagery that pervades the *Éloge*. In their focus on an "interior vision," that would be illuminated by "fireflies" against the obscuring "nuits bleutées" 'bluish nights' (17) of Négritude's "exterior vision," their daylight is one that would be of exploration, discovery, scientific processes, to "décomposer ce que nous sommes tout en purifiant ce que nous sommes par l'expose en plein *soleil de la conscience* des mécanismes cachés de notre aliénation" ("de-compose what we are, all while purifying what we are, by exposing the hidden mechanisms of our alienation to the full *sun of consciousness*[8]"; 22). The constant self-questioning of *créolité*, "une question à vivre" ("a question to be lived";

[8] *Soleil de la conscience* is the title of one of Glissant's first theoretico-poetic works, so this enlightenment strategy is duly infused with a local literary referentiality.

27), is bolstered by a strong belief in the enlightenment model of knowledge, always drawing on the imagery of light: "Nous vivrons ses inconforts comme un mystère à accepter et à élucider" ("We will live its discomforts as a mystery to accept and to elucidate"; 28). The Créolistes' elaboration of their *lumières* 'Enlightenment' perspective on knowledge and culture creation and preservation relies on its argumentative other in Césaire's Négritude, which they take care to re-present as starkly distinct from their more rigorous "interior vision," naming Cesaire's work an "exterior vision" comparable even to the alienation of Europeanist emulation. Négritude is made to "éclipse" (17) Gilbert Gratiant's Creole "fireflies," and its legacy is seen as obscure and engendering "de dénonciations… qui tournèrent bientôt à vide… hors sol, hors peuple, hors lectorat" ("denunciations… soon just spinning its wheels… far from the land, far from a people, far from any readership…"; 21).

While filing Négritude and Césaire away among moments of intellectual "darkness" in Antillean literary history, the Créolistes also file away its rebellion, its "screams" and the "*extériorité de l'expression de la révolte"* ("exteriority of the expression of revolt"; 20). Indeed, the Créolistes define their *créolité* as no longer an angry "anti-colonialism" (39), but a first step towards the exploration of the creole self as they imagine it—a part, and a significant part at that, of humanity, of a universal expression and being. Indeed, even while Universalism (with a capital U) is repeatedly denounced, it is always specifically the Universalism defined by Europe that must be avoided. That is, the Créolistes' overall objective has to do with a broad vision through which creole culture is but a first step in a larger global culture of *créolité*, which presents ambitiously its own, presumably more encompassing notion of the

Universal, a universal paradoxically following the form and purpose inherited from enlightenment Europe. Césaire's revolutionary anti-colonialism, also anti-Europe, was too limited in its Africanist reach, and ended up "hors sol, hors lecteur" ("far from the land, far from a readership"), but theirs would aspire to be universal. Expressing disapproval of the "splendide isolement" 'splendid isolation' (30) of migratory cultures in the Americas that did not "creolize" (32), the Créolistes invoke in *créolité* "une humanité nouvelle" 'a new humanity' (26), a "nouvelle dimension de l'homme" ("new dimension of man"; 27).

This last point is one of the most fundamental ways in which Monchoachi's writing diverges from the Créolistes' attitude towards revolution. Even as the Créolistes reclaim the "tout-monde" [total-world] proposed by Glissant, Monchoachi has no such global ambitions. His work, starting with his emphasis on an Amerindian epistemology, privileges and remains within Antillean space to focus on Antillean life, even if isolation, the isolation so scorned by the Créolistes, is the outcome—and for Monchoachi, such isolation might even function as a strategy. After all, André Pierre-Louis is most known in Martinique for his inaccessibility, his isolation from the cultural center thanks to his geographic location in remote Vauclin, surrounded by forest and far from the cultural hubbub of Fort-de-France. Presumably living his poetic philosophy, the universality that expands to incorporate all of humanity is anathema to Monchoachi's careful, repetitive insistence on communion with Caribbean space.

**Staging Creole**

Monchoachi's mode of linguistic exegesis translates Creole, and in the unconventionality of its method, does so performatively. Much of his poetry that has been written in French, which is most of his poetry since the publication of bilingual *Mantèg* in 1980, as well as his many essays from the same period, engage in a dual meditation on French and Creole. His acts of explication, bringing Creole into the French such that the former is always the source of philosophical work and engagement, and the latter the vehicle of conveying meaning, performs an exegesis of European colonial practices in his uncovering of a diametrically opposed Creole mode of action. Meanwhile, his writing performs its own philosophy of translative performance by rhythmically, repetitively, but also physically enacting its reliance on multiple linguistic influences. In the essay "Se laisser dire" he launches the enactment of the Creole notion of "se laisser dire" ("let yourself be told") with "Alors il se mit en marche par un matin venteux d'avant carême" ("He started off walking one windy morning before the Dry Season"; 37). The poet begins walking, or marching, which is staged in conjunction with the beginning of his text, such that the walking is represented as the act that brings the poetic wisdom for writing: the walking and knowing the land becomes the means through which creoleness is translated physically from the earth, through the poet who walks on it, into French language: "*Écouter et parler*, c'est toujours, au propre et au figuré, marcher (marquer, tracer)" (*To listen and to speak* is always, literally and figuratively, to walk (to mark, to trace)"; 38). There is a ritual being staged here, where the poet's process of exegesis is given form through embodied activity, activity that connects the physical and

continuous contact with the earth, through the body, with the expression that takes form in the poet's words.

The form of Monchoachi's writing (his poetic essays), which stage language(s) as a story and activity to be revealed, is a kind of performance in its own right.[9] Its mixing of literary analysis, exegesis, narration, and poetics, imagining and modeling a means of seeing the world through language, itself enacts the relationship that he is attempting to elaborate between the world and one's specific language. In its poetic voice, his writing invites the world of readers or listeners to enter into and participate in his practice of language-as-world. As more Creole and other non-French words enter into the unfurling essay, he uses repetition to rhythmically sound out the invitation to the reader to engage, with him, in a multilinguistic uncovering of one's world.

**Creole-Amerindian *Habiter***

Much of Monchoachi's theorization of Antillean space comes from a theorization of the Amerindian relationship to it. The first (known) peoples to have existed in and with the Caribbean world, Amerindian living practices were de-authorized by colonization's appropriation of their land, and contemporary Antillean cultural practices have been largely cut off from its Amerindian forebears in Antillean space. Yet, while indigenous legacies have been constituted in contemporary Antillean

[9] It is worth nothing that such a poetic prose, a theoretical and poetic style of essay writing, is characteristic of Edouard Glissant's own more prominent works. An exploration of this stylistic coincidence would pay attention less to potential influence between the two (although genealogies of French or Antillean forebears might be instructive), and more to the way that this form of writing challenges the status of theory as a privileged mode of thought, and the embrace of the poetic in an incorporation of creole orality.

thought as non-existent and unknown, or erased and irrecuperable, Monchoachi reveals their continuing relevance, not through a mystical and romanticized representation of the opaque and ideal past, but through an admiring engagement with their language: an aspect of their existence that is cognitively accessible and, in its translation to the postcolonial Caribbean episteme, alive.

In the essay "*Nha Caéra, Rété,* Habiter," in addition to relying on the Carib word in the title that that contributes to the sentence "Chebeketae nhanha *n'hacaera* nhaoaria," (emphasis added) in French "ils nous ont enlevé nos terres, envahis" ("They have stolen our land, invaded us"; 12), Monchoachi links the Carib language to a contemporary Creole, finding "*béké*," the Creole word for the master and white man, embedded in the "Che*beke*tae" complaint. Bringing the Carib together with the Creole, again, he posits a potential connection between Creole "caye,' in French "case" 'home' and both the Carib word "Kairi," for earth, or country, and "nareta*caye*m," (emphasis mine) meaning "je me retire" (I retire) which is easily juxtaposed with the creole "ka rete kay'mwen," "je me retire dans ma caye" ("I retire to my home"; 13). Monchoachi's project thus brings Creole into a direct relation, through a potential and demonstrated inheritance from Carib language, with Carib modes of knowing and expressing themselves. The "retirement" as we will see later, is fundamental to his theorization of the Creole dialectical episteme in the form of its "restraint." But notable now is how the relation he stages represents a kindred notion of home not only as a structure but also as the land, and an attitude of reverence towards it.

Monchoachi's engagement with Carib language, it must be noted, is directed towards critique, and a very clear political position vis-a-vis power, appropriation, and

domination, the violent practices of colonization. However, more than an anti-colonial critique focused on human dispossession (which is not neglected, as the discussion of "nha caera" makes clear), this critique extends to and is focused also on the colonial attitude towards land. In fact, against universalizing humanist philosophies, Monchoachi's focus on the human is secondary, as seen in his critique of Europeans' "cartography" of men as dominating the earth, "une écriture des lieux par les hommes et au regard des hommes" ("a writing of place by men and for men"; "*Nha caéra*" 13). Privileged instead is the Amerindian's respect for the "spirit of the place": "une écoute par les hommes de la parole des lieux, qui se confond souvent avec la parole des dieux" ("men listening to the word of a place, which is often confused for the word of the gods"; 13). He bemoans the way that in European practice, "La présence des lieux y est occultée, supplantée par l'omniprésence de l'homme et de ses représentations" ("The presence of place is eclipsed, supplanted by the omnipresence of man and his allegories"; 18). Thus, in a comparison of how Carib language referred to the earth (cartopoetics) and how Europeans colonizers practiced naming (cartography), he shows us how the colonizer's appropriative attitude towards the earth bears out in the language. The chart of European names for Caribbean colonies that Monchoachi reproduces in his text reads like an inventory of bounty passed out to the winners of a game: "… Ile de Porto-Rico, *"aux Espagnols"*; Ile Sainte Croix, *"abandonnée"*; Saint Thomas, *"aux Danois"*" ("Island of Puerto Rico, *"to the Spanish"*; Saint Croix Island, *"abandoned"*; Saint Thomas, *"to the Danish"*; 14) and this is but a fraction of the names he reproduces. In counterpoint, his description of Amerindian topographical naming reveals "une cartopoétique caraïbe émanant de l'esprit des lieux" ("a Carib

cartopoetics emanating from the spirit of the place"; 17), thus: "*Iamahich*, l'Île aux Sources, la Jamaïque; *Aïtij,* Le Pays Âpre, pierreux, L'Île de Saint-Domingue; *Borinquen*, Terre des Hommes Forts, Porto-Rico; *Boyéké* est L'Île aux crabes, Vieques" ("*Iamahich*, The Island of Sources, Jamaica; *Aïtij*, The Harsh Land, stony, Hispaniola; *Borinquen,* Land of Strong Men, Puerto Rico; *Boyéké* is The Island of Crabes, Vieques"; 15-16).

Of interest here is the particular role that language plays, through Monchoachi's all-encompassing theory of Caribbean language as an objective and profoundly revelatory source of knowledge. The Caribs who, until this point, would have been a mystical and inaccessible people with no legacy, have here become not only contrapuntally accessible through their language, but, through contrast with the Europeans and in conjunction with Creole, they become the bearers of an attractive and coherent mode of existence that offers a substantial answer to the aggressive European colonizing ethic that has remained as the governing political mode in Martinique, even after decolonization. What does not form part of this valorized, inherently Caribbean epistemology, however, is a mystification of roots and origins such that a particular mix and mélange that produced the people of this place becomes representative of the whole. Unlike the anti-origins perspective of the Créolistes, their necessarily syncretic cultural productivity model, Monchoachi finds a geographically situated, local, and valid iterability between Amerindian modes of being Antillean and Creole modes of thinking, living, and speaking. For this, rather than primordial or constructed loyalties, history and language have provided a distinct rationale for the logic of this collectivity. Monchoachi's resurrection of Carib language, meanwhile,

more than conceptual, is performative. It enacts the same revelatory move that we will see in his Creole-French juxtaposition—making creole visible by modeling its use, and unavoidable by revealing its value.

**Reading *Nostrom*: Meeting Creole**

Monchoachi's specific strategy of linguistic negotiation between French and English is epitomized in his bilingual poem *Nostrom*, a text where the French and Creole face each other across the page. This choice of absolute Creole against absolute French, however, marks a novel perspective on how literary creation might be figured in both languages. Even when Monchoachi writes only in French, Creole words do not "fill in" as the untranslatable, creating tasty samples of opacity in an otherwise accessible text, a common critique made to Créoliste aesthetics, and to postcolonial poetics of language more generally.[10] Yet, even while a bilingual text presumably present both languages equitably, there is a heightened textual visibility to the Creole version of this poem, which is printed in bold while the French is italicized, visually less concrete. Neither Nostrom nor Mantèg (Monchoachi's other bilingual book of poetry) have French names to supplement the Creole ones, and in Nostrom, the two titles of the first section, juxtaposed, dramatizes a very visible difference of magnitude between the French and the Creole: the French title, "Belle conte" 'Beautiful tale', barely two syllables, compares poorly to the rhythmic and superlative Creole, "Twa

[10] In an analysis of *Amour Bilingue* by Algerian writer Abdelkebir Khatibi, Réda Bensmaïa contrasts Khatibi's linguistic strategy with what other multilingual postcolonial works in the Francophone world use, which he disparagingly represents as "techno-narcissistic devices that have characterized so many so-called modern Francophone works… typographical coquetry, all-purpose words, conspicuous lexical or syntaxical contortions."

Fwa Bel Kont" which could have been "Trois fois belle conte" in French ("Thrice beautiful tale"; 14-15). Nostrom is a long poem drawing on the oral form of a Creole funereal chant, so the importance of rhythm, or its lack thereof in the French, sets up a clear hierarchy of poetic value between the poems. Unlike the Créolistes' writings which frequently mix Creole into a primarily French prose, this Monchoachi text says that Creole is very present, and perhaps most surprising to the hypothetical non-creolophone reader, it can be quite blatantly inaccessible.

This inaccessibility is where my reading process began, or rather, in its opposite—a presumed ease of access. A non-creolophone reader myself, I attempted to benefit from the possibilities of the bilingual publication, endeavoring to "read" the Creole through the lens of the language I knew well, French. Coming from an Anglophone Caribbean background, I felt my knowing stance authorized, as well as my assumptions of shared regional epistemologies of language—after all, did not the Trinidadian vernacular I grew up speaking emerge out of a French Creole similar to Martinique's? Does Trinidad not still use French Creole expressions in its own vernacular, maybe even some of its syntax? The switch between standardized English and English-based Creoles was seamless for me, and this empowering sense of being an "insider" gave me a heady confidence that my knowledge of French, and an "instinct" for Creole intonation that I imagined myself possessing, would surely open up Monchoachi's Creole, especially if the French language, which I had long ago taken the time to learn, was printed right next to it. As a trained and eager comparatist, I predicted that exciting affinities and telling performative differences would emerge from the juxtaposition of the two texts.

That result of this approach was failure. Looking at the Creole page, instead of a poem I could compare with the French, I was faced with a visually unrecognizable text. I did not have the training even in the phonemes of Monchoachi's Creole, revealing in my attempts at pronuncation a useless fixation on French practices of reading sound. Turning to the dictionary, I found that it required a knowing dexterity between spellings. I learned that what I'd simply thought of as the "little" words, the *ka*'s, *ki*'s, *an*'s and *li*'s, some of which did not appear in any dictionary, were not just "prepositions" as my Europeanized education in language had taught me to infer, but had an intimidating number of entirely distinct meanings. I had not yet read Monchoachi's asserting in "Le pays nous," that Creole has no prepositions, but if I had, I would likely have wondered, in in my defeated arrogance: what on earth is the need for all this *extra* language? Ultimately, ex-spelled, I experienced a humbling acknowledgment that this Creole language was no easy intermediary between Caribbean "sound," "rhythm," "intonation" and "instinct," and an unemotional, educated, rational French. If anything, it expressed itself not in-between, but outside, in its bold and irreducible linguistic excess, in the untranslatable remnants that together constitute the mask that allows the Creole to exhibit itself even as it signifies through its impenetrability.

In this text, the visible juxtaposition of two languages placed across from each other on facing pages creates meaning. The juxtaposition of a bold Creole with an italicized French renders the French weak in appearance, delicate, perhaps audibly soft. The Creole text, on the other hand, is visually dominant, unavoidable (even if one were attempting to only read the French version), and full of inexplicable,

inaccessible, and mysteriously wordy language. In a verse pattern that appears more unruly than the French, the Creole conveys more movement and certainly more energy. Even section titles convey this: the French "Belle conte," placed across from the Creole "Twa fwa bel kont," results in the Creole claiming a significantly more poetic sound with its rhyme (twa fwa), its rhythm, and its significantly less subdued expression.

If in this bilingual edition the French and Creole are supposed to be different versions of the same text, then the author's choice to present them across such visible and visibly biased differences begs a new kind of reading, one that engages both languages and attends to how they diverge. Meanwhile, if a French speaker were to try to decipher the Creole without learning it, perhaps through comparison with the French, hoping that the proximity between the languages would make the Creole accessible (as my reading of the title above does, and indicates the possibility of), the task usually proves itself impossible, which my first attempt to read the poem shows—lines and word counts throughout the poem do not equate, and Monchoachi's Creole orthography does not follow French rules. Part of what this text does then, especially for the French reader, is visibly assert a Creole specificity that remains purposefully, boldly difficult, and barely accessible.

In my attempt to read *Nostrom*, reduced to accessing only the French side of the page, I surrendered in frustration to my limits until the fourth poem, where something changed (24-25). Suddenly there were greater spaces between the lines and words, more repetition, more cognates, and more visible equity between lines; I could see which Creole line and words "translated" which French ones. I recognized

synonyms, heard the kindred sounds between French and Creole, intuited their meaning, even if deconstructively. The text had opened up, momentarily. I learned a few Creole words, I made a few grateful comparisons, and I discovered the deep surprise and pleasure of reading, simultaneously, one known and one *new, unknown language*, accessibly only through a translative approach to reading.

The first thing Monchoachi's bilingual poetry does is affirm the validity, wholeness, and unavoidable presence of Creole language, its materiality as written text and its complexity as a mode of knowing. It does this both for the French reader who might assume its accessibility through proximity, and for the Caribbean reader, such as myself, who might have been colonially educated to see Creole as a simple, ungrammatical, "broken" version of the proper, whole, and "standard" European language in which serious work happens, and for which a serious education is necessary. Such a Caribbean reader, I must note, could just as well be a Martinican who has been educated entirely in French, and for whom the Creole orthography might also impose a degree of alienation.[11] These common attitudes towards Creole language are of a kind with those that have made its standardization in education, its use institutionally, and its consecration to literary creation a site of continued struggle, particularly in the French Antilles where the structures of governance remain French.

[11] My suggestion here is not that a Martinican would necessarily not *understand* Monchoachi's Creole poetry, but that the use of the Creole writing system, which generally does not follow a French logic, can be surprisingly foreign visually if the French is the only method and experience of written langauge that one would bring with them to the text. Similarly, I would note that while a native French speaker could potentially locate affinities between a Creole and French sound orally, the French reader might also be disadvantaged by the difficulties of arriving at these sounds from the text precisely because of their unfamiliarity with the Creole system of writing.

Monchoachi's bilingual poetry imposes the task of translation, not only to she who does not speak Creole, but additionally to she who does not (consider that she might have to learn to) read it. In my foreigner's introduction to Creole, Monchoachi had dramatized the failure of the approach that assumes and privileges comprehension, and initiated a pedagogy of reading through the imposed exclusion from the underestimated tongue—translation becomes inherent to reading. This pedagogy should not be understood as a responsibility given to and taken by the local to validate herself before others; it is instead a lesson in the dangers of assuming that comprehension can be achieved through a predetermined and privileged system of knowing, through another, more "prestigious" language and linguistic system. As I noted with regards to the Martinican reader's potential exclusion from this text, even the local might approach it with these assumptions, and so even the Martinican reader (if some such unified subject does exist) could also fail before Monchoachi's heterolingual address.

Still, in the fourth poem, where comprehension for the French-language reader uneducated in Creole becomes a glimmering hope, Monchoachi makes visible both the complicity between Creole and French, as well as affirming Creole's clear differences from the French, and opens up the possibility of a perhaps stuttered "reading." The published experience of a bilingual text is, for the non-Creole speaker, an opportunity to meet the Creole language. This bilingual choice, this linguistic juxtaposition, is simultaneously the mise-en-scène of Creole's restorative opacity as well as, paradoxically, the possibility of revelation for the persistent reader—she who acknowledges difficulty and endures. The bilingual writing presents the text *as text*,

opaque but readable, its inherent and complex viability as signifying object produced from the juxtaposition. But it was also, simultaneously, the imposition and enactment of the process of translation, where the unknowable becomes—through the social labor of analysis, interpretation, and study, the process of serious reading—a source of knowledge, and site for communication and comparative revelation. The staging of the "foreign" with its (in)accessible doubling of text and its indulgence in "extra" and "excess" language recalls the Benjaminian figure of the translation's coexisting but distinct robe, adding grandeur and meaning in its folds. We will return to this image shortly.

**Creole philosophy**

Monchoachi's strategy of French and Creole poetics takes seriously its Creole language text, but does not seek to render it unreadable. The Créoliste's sampling of Creole in their texts, sometimes transparently through glosses and rephrasing in French, and sometimes without translation, but with the peppered opacity that offers a taste of Creole's exotic strangeness, does not force or invite the reader to acknowledge her ignorance, to face the task of learning Creole before engaging in interpretation or critique. It often risks rendering Creole little more active and significant than a strange and intriguing interruption of the text that is otherwise read or comprehended. The Créoliste Creole frequently functions, at least in part, *in its strangeness,* its foreignness.[12] Monchoachi's Creole poetics, on the other hand, does not allow Creole to be sampled or even sounded out, unless the work has been done to learn its

[12] The French "etrange" conveys both "strange" and "foreign."

phonemes, to engage with its spelling, to acknowledge its specificities and its holistic value. By allowing the Creole to open up to only the reader that has persisted up to the fourth poem, Monchoachi wants her to encounter Creole as she would encounter a new body of knowledge—an exciting but challenging resource, a text with the need for exegesis, and not a transparently simple "body" of expression separable from the complex and intelligent mind. This body, in Monchoachi's work, is important to thought, and we will return to it shortly.

Like the process of translation, which represents a previously inaccessible text to a reader, but that, like any representation, only accedes to part of its meaning, this work on Creole to which Monchoachi invites the reader is a work of absolute validation of a Creole literary corpus. It brings the Creole onto the literary scene through French in order to contribute to the wealth of human knowledge that is available in French—the curating and selecting work that is undertaken by standard translation market processes. Yet, in a transformation of the ethics of translation, Monchoachi's writings does this translative representation without erasing the process, instead imposing the necessity of translation by making unavoidably visible the value of the linguistically misrecognized. In so doing, he also makes visible the impossibility of complete possession, complete "comprehension," which Glissant reveals to be an appropriative process,[13] and gives to Creole what most translated texts in already validated languages have not so far been permitted: the persistent visibility that retains and insists on its unknowable specificity. Monchoachi's work, between these languages, is in fact a transformative intervention in the process of translation

[13] Glissant reads the French word "comprendre" by underlining its "prendre" root, which in French means "to take." (*Poetique de la relation* 204-206)

that promises to call into question the assumption that any language possesses the ability to contain, address, or equate another.

**Translating "loosely"**

To situate Monchoachi's specifically translative project of unveiling and exhibiting Creole language specificity through his poetry and his essays, I turn to Walter Benjamin's seminal text on translation, "The Task of the Translator." In "Un *zhaï,*" an essay using the Creole word for seduction to describe orality, Monchoachi writes: "Par la parole et par le corps, nous abordons les extrêmes: la mort, dieu, les chimères… Mais c'est la parole, non le corps, qui est "poursuivie par la lubricité"" ("Through word and through the body, we approach the extremes: death, god, chimeras… But it is the word, not the body, that is "haunted by lubricity""; 58) Parole, then, is that which attains an excess, which is most free, and which acts outside of and unbound to, even in perversion of, the body, the self, or the original. The description continues to confirm this: "Ayant fait choix de se laisser porter par la parole, le corps fait aussi choix de l'excès. Car la parole est par nature ce qui déborde, ce qui va au-delà, au seul mouvement de sa griserie, de son ébriété. Elle le mène droit à la débauche" ("Having chosen to let itself be carried by the word, the body has also chosen excess. For the word is by nature that which overflows, which goes beyond, following the momentum of its intoxication, its drunkenness. It takes the body directly into debauchery"; 59). This excess and extreme that is practiced by the word, taking the body (original) along with it in a debaucherous (traitor/translator's) journey, recalls the image of the luxurious robe through which Benjamin describes language's relationship to content in

a translation, and by extension, the relationship of the target language to the original: "Whereas content and language form a certain unity in the original like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds. For it signifies a more exalted language than its own and thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien" (258). This unsuitable and alien quality, which is more "exalted" in its luxuriously excessive language, creates precisely the kind of staging in which the body "chooses" the word in Monchoachi, as the original "chooses" its translation. In this staging, translation or *parole*'s liberation from the original or the body, suggestively described as alien(ation), leads to a baroque unfolding and unfurling of language that outdoes itself, that produces the doubleness that becomes henceforth constitutive of the text.

In Benjamin's "translation," language, like Monchoachi's "parole" 'word', is the product of a letting go that borders on "looseness": "Translations… prove to be untranslatable not because of any inherent difficulty, but because of the looseness with which meaning attaches to them" (Benjamin 262). Now consider Monchoachi: "Le corps s'articule à la parole: dire cela, c'est dire que là, et en tant que tel, il se fait entendre, il se meut dans des espaces a priori inconvertibles, et par conséquent, il s'expose, il est *en jeu*. Allant désormais avec la parole, il va aussi avec le risque" ("The body is articulated by the word: to say this is to say that there, in that way, it makes itself understood, it moves through spaces a priori inconvertible, and as a result it exposes itself, it is *in play*. Going with the word, now, it also goes with risk"; 59). Just as translation for Benjamin's is itself untranslatable, fixed to its historicity and thus, "inconvertible," the word also promiscuously brings the original (body) out into

a particular and historically fixed world, lets its previous unknowability be revealed and readable, lets it enter "*en jeu*," '*in* the *play*' of global language and discourse.[14]

But after this first stage of exposure, the "corps" 'body', the core, or the original, eventually reaches a limit of play, reaches a stage where it refuses the complete revelation, bordering on perversion, that the garrulous word would have it perform, and while the word multiplies and loosely plays with meanings, the body "keeps the mystery… secret and obscure" resisting complete transparency:

> Il s'agit aussi et fondamentalement d'un jeu amoureux dans lequel la parole à la fois se joue du corps et joue du corps avec une liberté de ton et un cérémonial d'où n'est pas absent une certaine grandiloquence. Son objet est de démasquer (et de révéler,) plus encore: de revendiquer la relation avec le corps qui n'est, dans l'oralité, ni voilée, ni occulte. La parole s'en glorifie : elle met *toutes ses affaires dehors*. Elle est amoureuse de son corps et veut *porter son nom*; elle n'est, pour lui, que transports. Lui ne cesse de lui rappeler son lieu d'assignation, il lui dit sa demeure, le côté où elle repose son corps et d'où elle prend de nouvelles poses. Cependant, il garde secret et obscur le mystère de cette parturition : c'est ce que jamais elle ne saura, ce dont on ne peut parler. Il suffit, ensemble, l'un et l'autre, d'en célébrer l'épiphanie.

[14] The historicity referenced comes out of Benjamin's suggestion that a translation is necessarily historically and geographically specific. "This disjunction prevents translation and at the same time makes it superfluous. For any translation of a work originating in a specific stage of linguistic history represents, in regard to a specific aspect of its content, translation into all other languages. Thus, ironically, translation transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm, since it can no longer be displaced by a secondary rendering." (258)

> It is also, and is fundamentally, about a lover's game in which the word both plays the body and plays with the body using a liberated tone and a ceremoniousness that also carries a certain grandiloquence. Her goal is to unmask (and to reveal) even more: to claim the relationship with the body that is not, in orality, either veiled or hidden. The word revels in it: she puts *all her business on show*. She is in love with her body and wants to *carry his name*. But for the body, the word is no more than a means. He never stops reminding her of her role, telling her where she belongs, the side where she can lay her body and from which she can enter into new poses. However, the body keeps secret and obscure the mystery of this birth; it is what the word will never know, that of which we cannot speak. It is enough, together, as one and as the other, to celebrate the epiphany. (60-61)

Putting aside, for the moment, Monchoachi's deeply problematic reprisal of grammatical gendering in French to present a heterosexist and misogynistic understanding of seduction,[15] we see here, in contrast to the Benjamin's exhibitive "robe" (or parole/word) a "content" (or corps/body) that is not willingly exposed—not entirely at least—even while the exhibition enacted brings a degree of pleasure, an enjoyment of the game, its risk, and its ceremony. The entire "*zhaï*," in fact, relies on the distance remaining between them in order to maintain the relation, which is bound

[15] Monchoachi participates unabashedly in a masculinized conception of creole and Antillean cultural norms, drawing easily on stereotypes of emotional and hysterical feminine behavior for his theorizations. One might claim in his defense that the very seduction being elaborated here demands such a male-female / knowledge-hysteria binary. However, as fellow Antillean Maryse Condé shows throughout her oeuvre, the reference to sensuality as a model for performative expression need not resort to disempowering and reductive symbolization of male and female practices.

up in the push and pull between what is revealed and what remains under cover. The simultaneously "loose" and "exhibitive" context through which we can think the translative process offers an instructive model of understanding the stakes of the "revelatory" translative writing that Monchoachi undertakes, whether in his bilingual poetry with facing pages that "exhibits" Creole, or in his exegetical essays that unpack Creole, gradually, using the French as the "robe" that brings it visibility, but via which, as with Benjamin's "content," the Creole "body" remains characteristically enigmatic, an original with infinite future potential translations, a complex and deliberately seductive core/corps/body that gives in to interpretation or translation precisely because what is exhibited is always only part of the story.

We can read the corps 'body' as the specificity of Caribbeanness, the core of culture, place, or people, of which expression is constantly attempted through exuberance, pride, exaggeration, spectacle, revelation, visibility—but that core is protected because its secret is never entirely accessible, *even to its own*, thus foreclosing the search for an essence. The relation between word (revelation) and core (reticence), is ongoing and necessary. Meanwhile, the performance between them is the only truth that orality offers, in the duality of robe and body, of body and sound, self and performance that would reveal, exhibit, and "show off" even while retaining its secret.

**Monchoachi's transnational restraint**

In "Un *zhaï*," Monchoachi gives us the key to his entire prose practice: exegesis, revelation, translation. In the end, the core/body or Caribbean specificity is only

performatively revealed in the language being spoken or written, since the parole/word does not have full access, and is, worse, rather exhibitive, exaggerating, too quick to words and too free with them. This dual translativity that on one hand reveals creole even while it preserves a certain relationship to *retenue* 'restraint', gives us the form of Monchoachi's transnational performativity. His non-local projects in French, his extrapolating essays, are performative in their relationship to the outside. The form of this transnationally bound expression, written text, confirms this limited vocation, since even in his valorization of orality and the incorporation of it in his poetry, his stance is that orality is the opposite of literature. While orality holds onto the body, and is constituted by its ability to be connected to the body, when Monchoachi says, "ce dont on ne peut parler" ("that of which we cannot speak"), we see the word that has been separated from the body—literature—that *cannot* be spoken, that is separated from the body and is thus derivative, "inconvertible." This whole performance becomes the entering into relation with the world: "Avec l'avènement de la parole, du verbe, l'homme se re-présente au monde, il se présente de nouveau. C'est pourquoi cet avènement lui est rappelé comme un commencement absolu, un acte premier et fondateur, l'entaille et l'éclat, même si son origine demeure à jamais obscure" ("With the advent of the word, of the verb, man re-presents himself to the world, he presents himself anew. That is why he is reminded of this coming as of an absolute commencement, a primary and foundational act, the cut and the splinter, even if his original remains forever obscure"; 62). Entering the world is also a way of being political—the only way, perhaps, for these precariously (not) independent French Caribbean islands. In re-presenting the Antillean self, what Monchoachi privileges is

variable, and so is its presumed audience. In texts explicitly meant for the "outside," such as the poem "Le lieu est la parole" ("The place is the word"; 27-29) included in a voudon exhibit at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and in its publication, "L'Esprit des lieux: oriflammes du vaudou haïtien," the poem he selects is one that emphasizes rhythm, bringing orality into the written text on the backdrop of voudon spiritual imagery. It is a venturing into the world that remains firmly embedded in a Caribbean framework.

Similarly, a poetry and picture book by David Damoison and Monchoachi, *Paris-Caraïbes: un voyage au sens*, seems explicitly bound to an external audience that would immerse itself in the Caribbean through images of its people and the strange and exotic verse of its poets. Yet, as Damoison indicates in his preface to the project, it comes out of his own diasporic subjectivity as the child of Antillean immigrants in Paris, an identity through which the Caribbean functions simultaneously as a space of home and one of travel going in both directions—towards the Metropole and then back towards the site of nostalgia. Damoison's project includes, and incorporates, Parisian Antilleans, like himself, with their double consciousness, their alienation from Caribbean identity then their politicization as raced bodies in France, and in particular, their imagining of the Caribbean that figures most prominently in their parent's dreams, and in their idyllic and curious visits to the homeland. In an intervention that is simultaneously exoticizing and reappropriative, these semi-exilic figures are here afforded the space to lay claim to their Antilles, with all its shiny picture-book ethnography even while achieving a privileged access to the meaning of that space through none other than the performatively translative poetry of

Monchoachi. One might consider that the inclusiveness of Monchoachi's community is determined by desire as much as it is by roots—the intention to participate, the investment in the space, just like the investment of time in the language, constitute sufficient criteria to membership—a theory that we will see take form in analysis of his essay "Le pays nous." What he offers in his writing, meanwhile, midway between revelation and protective opacity, is a performative means (through language, as always) for entering into it, with its full quota of orality, seduction, alienation, and rhythm.

To this end, Monchoachi's repetitions and explications seek to rehearse the Creole sound, reaffirm its possibility, and expose its depth of knowledge, particularly with regards to its place and people. Like many of his texts, *Nostrom* enacts such an encounter with Creole difference, and unveils the Creole tongue through an approach bound up in rhythmic and embodied strategies of Creole cultural practice.

**The Sounds of *Nostrom***

*Nostrom* recounts a journey, a long encounter with and contemplation of death, certainly apt to the Antillean *conte* or folktales that were frequently told during funereal wakes. Georges Henri Léotin informs us that the poem has roughly the same structure as a creole *conte* (13): a narrative punctuated by incantatory chants, and with the intervention of the storyteller at the end. Rhythmic, lyrical and taking a long epic form to speak of a man on a journey, the poem incorporates numerous aspects of a lived creole poetics, one of which is the "sortilège" or spell of spiritual practices. Here,

we will focus on some stylistic devises that integrate these aesthetic and thematic priorities with Monchoachi's translative multilingual strategy.

"et le sollicite dans sa précellence…" ("and solicits him in his precellence"; 16)

"ka mandé-y aten i fè-y wè i si douvan douvan…" (17)

"le mettant au défi de lui démontrer qu'il est à l'avant-garde" ("daring him to show that he is of the avant-garde"; Confiant, *Dictionnaire* 52)

The preceding quotes are all presumably the same line. The first is the French version, the second the Creole, and the third is a different French translation provided by Raphael Confiant when he uses this line in his Creole dictionary to provide a contextual example for the Creole word *aten*.

The idea that these texts might be identical, or a direct translation of each other, can be discounted in the conflicting "translation" in Confiant's dictionary, which forces us, then, to consider the non-semantic value of the version Monchoachi himself produces for his poem, presumably more suited for a poetic work than for a dictionary that is concerned with literal meanings. It is worth pointing out that in a translation of *Mantèg,* Brent Hayes Edwards' doubles the already bilingual text, revealing entirely distinct poems, both English, coming out of the Creole and the French versions of Monchoachi's originals. The reaffirmation of a Caribbean specificity might be at work here, a refusal to render the two languages equivalent or even proximate.

This very same gesture is what I find compelling in this juxtaposition: the approximation of these two poems (materially, in the text, on facing pages), leaning in

when some clear "synonyms" are identifiable, and then leaning out as the rhythms are articulated distinctly, the assonances and the rhymes—the sounds that mark a poetic text. Monchoachi insists on this distance when he says, repeatedly, that the difference "est dans le ton" 'is in the *tone*'.[16] Thus, in the preceding quote, the regular rhythm of the "dé-y/ aten i/ fè-y/ wè i," culminating in a rhythmic repetition drummed in by the "d's" of "douvan douvan," has a different emphasis than the lilting, lisping "l" and "s" sounds of "le sollicite dans sa précellence", which produces an almost symmetrical structure where p-s-l-s sound of "precellence" echoes, in reverse, the "s-l-s-t" sound of sollicite. The symmetry sought in this case, in the French, is passed over, rather, for a forward-moving rhythm in the Creole, ending with its emphatic and rhythmic ending of "douvan douvan." The constant return to the "i" and "y" sounds in "ka mandé-y aten i fè-y wè i si douvan douvan…" creates a beat that spreads out the emphasis throughout the line, maintaining the rhythm, until culminating in the distinct and deeper "boom" sound of the last word repeated.

The specificities of the contrasts in the French and Creole sounds in *Nostrom* are far from uniform in the text, but the differentiation is. Certainly readable as an effect of the different needs of the two languages, as a common compromise to be made in the translation of poetry that must emerge with the poetic effects of sound in both versions, two things are certain: firstly, the texts are, deliberately and by the author's doing (as opposed to a distinct translator's, the more common producer of a bilingual text), poetically distinct; secondly, the texts are both, differently but in

[16] Monchoachi repeatedly evokes "le ton," or "tone" as the vital element of specificity in the language and his work. Some examples: "Le corps est *dans le ton*" ("The body is *in the tone*"; 85), in "La case ou se tient la lune"; "Tout y est souvent dans le *ton*" ("Everything is there in the *tone*"; 61), in "Un *Zhai*"; and "Il y faut le ton!" ("The tone is necessary"; 43), in "Se laisser dire."

parallel ways, written with an emphasis on the rhythmic sound they produce, one the enactment of an experience of orality, with its auditory devices that reveal the importance of memory, audience, and ritual, the communal incantatory experience that is at the base of this textual representation of funereal *conte* performance. Thus, the frequent reminder to keep the sound, the recounting, the communal call-and-response dialectic going: "Mais qu'on maintienne le rythme, nous reprenons le chant!" ("But keep the rhythm going, let's start again with the chant!"; 20).

Unlike the playful interruptions and syntactic modulations of the particular brand of *créolité* practiced by the Créolistes, the translative visibility at work in Monchoachi's poetic project is quieter, more discreet, but equally effectual. And indeed, this poet's practice is one that takes seriously the practice of silence, the slowness to speech, the patience of an undirected journey. In "Se laisser dire," Monchoachi considers speaking a privilege, and the quiet waiting, patiently, for the right moment and the right response, a duty: "laisse-moi te dire" ("let me tell you"), and, "donne-moi (ou accorde-moi de) te dire" ("give me, (or agree to let me) tell you"). In this condition, his bilingual text in *Nostrom* comes into the fullness of its significance as simultaneity. Calling again upon an idiomatic Creole expression, in his discourse on the February 2009 strikes in the Antilles, he takes further the implications of this quiet écoute (listening): "Cet autre "faire"…: Mwen là, je (suis) là, autrement dit: présent à la présence, tel mon faire. Mwen la [sic]: tourné vers la présence et tenant ferme. Le créole dit: "laisser grainer," à l'écoute du son des grains du chacha (maracas). Et en recevant le *ton*" ("This other "doing"… Mwen la, I (am) here, in other words: present to presence, such is my doing. Mwen la: turned towards presence

and staying put. The Creole says: "let it seed," listening to the sounds of the chacha's (maracas') seeds. While receiving the *tone*"; "Le Pays Nous" 128). Here, together with the idea of stillness above and beyond meaning, Monchoachi is speaking of the weight of presence, but furthermore, of the "let it seed" that his text performs, in Creole and French, right next to and in patient presence of the other sound, the other language simultaneously tuning in on the facing page, facing and being present to the other, as in *Nostrom*. No greater doing, or faire, no expectation of an *accomplir* 'accomplish' intervenes here. When he rejects what he considers the unavoidable "rationality" of French, it is a judgment against the clarity that weighs heavily against his explorations of a creoleness less beholden to the sign, a clarity contained in physical presence. Brent Hayes Edwards calls attention to this specificity when he prefaces his translation of Mantèg: "My translation is doubled… but not mirrored. Both are English versions of Mantèg that strive to attend to the difference between French and Creole, the work of their discrepance in the original. As in Mantèg itself, but otherwise, it is left to the reader to hear what carries across the gap" (137). That "shuttling" across the gap, as Edwards takes care to underline, is precisely where Monchoachi's poetry must be experienced—not in meaning that the poet is adamant to dismiss, but in the sound of the work. In his meditation on the écouter-parler (listening-speaking) that "Se laisser dire" ponders, Monchoachi describes the topos of the Antillean marketplace and the experience of wandering directionless through it:

> … d'y *perdre son corps*. La langue nous offre alors ce qu'elle n'offre pas lorsqu'elle est véhiculée et dominée par le sens, quelque chose à la fois de très palpable et d'une immatérialité ou d'un irréel qui la nimbe:

> sa texture, son timbre, ses intonations, sa couleur particulière, sa retenue et son débord.
>
> …there, *to lose one's body*. Language offers, then, what it will not when it is directed and dominated by meaning, something that is both palpable and of an immateriality and unrealness that haloes it: its texture, timbre, intonations, its particular color, its restraint and its excesses. (42)

Against the rational of meaning, language becomes sensual, something experienced only through the physical experience of exposing oneself to it as to the tactile, visual, or raw sound—without the sign. That sensual experience of language is the one that carries all value for Monchoachi. Only in opening to it does any sign, any call, come through with conviction. In his account, one vendor's voice finally cuts through the market murmur, indicating that in experiencing sound the meaningful is not disallowed. Or, as we see in the concept of the *zhaï*, the language does not get *through*, but engages in a sensuous dance with the body.

**Performance**

In Monchoachi's staging of a dialogue of desire/attraction, escape, and alienation, there is an incorporation of the non-ideal, non-normative of the Caribbean, where even the "illusion of totality" that Benitez-Rojo idealizes in his discussion of Caribbean performance would only undermine the dialectical dance, made possible through the rift of a foundational, de-totalizing alienation that leads to ecstatic liberation.

The performance of the Creole *zhaï* relies on several important elements: the call (or the "violent apostrophe"), the game, and the alienation, liberty, and ecstasy that the call and the game set into motion. Based around the presumed alienation of body and word, the apostrophe is the call that creates a "scene" upon which the seductive dance of excess (word) and reserve (body) plays out its erotic game. Important to understand here is the use of alienation not as a fatalism, but rather as the necessary prequel for initiating this game that leads to ecstasy. The ecstasy in question comes about because, in the "sublime alienation" (58), sublime for its path to liberty, the game is an endless, constant back and forth, where "cela se livre et cela se retire pourtant" ("it surrenders and yet it pulls away"; 58), quite like the "je me retire dans ma case" ("I retire into my house") that we saw before. For Monchoachi's conjunction of Carib and Creole earth and home, that "restraint" represents well the play between man and the earth: "il faut surtout l'entendre comme une violente apostrophe. Mais cette apostrophe a ceci de particulier qu'elle met en scene la parole et le corps" ("it must above all be understood as a violent apostrophe. But this apostrophe is also particular in how it stages the word and the body"; 59). The valuable end of this *en/jeu* 'game/question', result of such a "violent" call, is liberty itself: "Car c'est la parole qui donne au corps ce jeu dont il a tant besoin, puisqu'il y puise sa liberté/aliénation et son extase" ("For it is the word that grants the body this game which it so needs, because that is where it draws its liberty/alienation and its ecstasy"; 59).

**Postcolonial theory and performance**

In order to go deeper into this theory of performance, I am want to focus on Monchoachi's persistent engagement with two concepts that are essential to thinking postcoloniality: alienation and freedom. Orality, we know, is the idealized form of expression in Monchoachi; orality is the closest practice or concept that can be connected with any traditional culture or cultural authenticity. But orality, the object and product of the body/word dialectic, engendered by the "call" and producing the dance, only comes to be because of a primary alienation. Indeed, this particular notion of performance is a product of the violent moment of contact that initiates colonization, a violence that continues to act and reinitiate the dance through the alienation of body and word, its "violente apostrophe." Yet, because alienation is engaged actively through the staged restraint-excess dialectic between the body and the word, it is also the first moment in the drive to liberty.

Alienation has become a key aspect of understanding the condition of the colonized beyond material dispossession, and has been particularly instrumental in a Martinican intellectual genealogy as theorized by Monchoachi's forebear and theorist of decolonization theory, Frantz Fanon. Fanon's treatment of alienation takes on a particularly cynical timbre as it describes the everyday violence of colonial cultural and racial hierarchies, wherein the black colonized man and woman have come to depreciate themselves and value, rather, the white colonizer, his language, his culture, his phenotype, and his philosophy. Language is one area of alienation to which Fanon gives particular attention, as he argues that the alienated Antillean pathologically strives to become French by how he speaks French, to suppress Creole (as it had

already been suppressed, violently, by the colonizer), and to erase all trace of Caribbean specificity—paradoxical as this might seem from a geographical perspective. Colonial alienation remains one of the central concepts of postcolonial theory, and its linguistic effects have been explored in other postcolonial contexts, most notably in Africa, through Ngugi wa Thiong'o ongoing critique of African writers' persistence at writing in English (and other European languages) while their native tongues are neglected. Ngugi calls for a more coherent decolonization through which writers recognize the value of producing literature in languages that are consistent with the productive and imaginative contexts of the African peoples they emerge from, and presumably write for and about.

Writing originally in Creole only, Monchoachi can be presumed to be, if not a proponent of Ngugi's critique, at least an early participant in a linguistic decolonization like that advocated by the African writer. Monchoachi's first texts work directly towards a cultural decolonization by providing the literary material necessary to an education in Creole, one not beholden to French, the colonizer's language. Monchoachi's early engagements with a thought of alienation would also, like Ngugi's, have been influenced by Marxist theory, through which the alienation that underlies capitalist labor processes sets the stage for the territorial appropriation and material dispossession of colonization, particularly with regards to the indigenous peoples' absolute (material and cultural) dispossession in the Caribbean. In Monchoachi's French writings that we have been exploring, however, the notion of alienation appears to be distinct from the overdetermined anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist theories that we usually identify in Caribbean literature. Indeed, it is of

particular interest in this region (the French Antilles), with its complex history of emancipation and questionable process of liberation from colonization, which is to say, a decolonization that never expelled the colonizer, as Fanon would have advocated. Monchoachi's linking of alienation and liberty presents a radically new perspective on expression in the postcolony.

In attempting to think agency as not bound by intention, Homi Bhabha's dense theorizations of postcolonial hybridity proves useful for situating Monchoachi's contribution to a theory of (post)colonial linguistic performance. In his extrapolation on the structures of colonized mimicry, Bhabha demonstrates how the values of colonizing powers came into conflict with its imperial mission and produce the incoherence of their own systems*:*

> Locke's Second Treatise… *splits* to reveal the limitations of liberty in his double use of the word "slave": first, simply descriptively as the locus of a legitimate form of ownership, then as the trope for an intolerable, illegitimate exercise of power. What is articulated in that distance between the two uses is the absolute, imagined difference between the "Colonial" State of Carolina and the Original State of Nature" (123).

Monchoachi reprises the "distance between the… "Colonial" State of Carolina and the Original State of Nature" when he triangulates alienation, freedom, and ecstasy, all accessible only through a Creole-Amerindian *intention*, through performance. That is, the possibility of engaging an Amerindian practice of Natural "civility" articulates itself *by making use of* enduring colonial legacies (that foundational colonial act of

alienation), just as Monchoachi articulates his notion of Antillean episteme in Creole and Carib languages *by making use of* French.

**Le Pays Nous: Liberty**

In order to foreclose any assumption that Monchoachi's incorporation of alienation constitutes a valorization of colonization and an assimilation of colonial values, I would like to go a little deeper into his concept of liberty, which he has insistently linked with alienation. In "Le pays nous" ("We Country"), Monchoachi argues that the charges of xenophobia in the Antillean 2009 strike's slogan are based only in the French translation, "La Martinique est à nous, La Martinique n'est pas à eux" ("Martinique is ours, it is not theirs"; 123). He insists that the alterity constructed in the Creole "Matinik sé tânou, Matinik sé pa tayo" relies not in the meaning of words, but in the excess signification of the Creole syntax, the rhythm and sound indicating to the reader how to understand the construction. This rhythm, Monchoachi avers, sounds out the meanings of "tânou" and "tayo," and confers instead a sense of the intimacy between a person, her people, and her country. The "is for us" of "tanou" in Creole, unlike the "est à nous" in French, invents an "us" not of race, but of solidarity, of the people as one, joined in the doubled liaison that turns three French words into one in creole. This "people" is pronouncing itself against the individual who does not enter into the collectivity implied in "tanou," but prefers to exploit them. "Tanou" thus performs the solidarity of an individual with her people, which is her country, which is, for Monchoachi, also her tongue. The slogan reaffirms that the country was no more than "us," no other criteria than a body of people who chose to act together for

collective benefit. Here we see clearly the meaning of language for Monchoachi, where he shows solidarity with a tongue (Creole) in which meaning, in his estimation, could be found outside the hegemony of the sign: in the sound that it produces, in the rhythm that it performs; as he says "il y faut le *ton*" ("the *tone* is essential").

We recognize, in the "excess" through which language carries more meaning than a pure core (corps/body), the word/body dialectic theorized in "Un *zhaï*." We also note the clear signs of political affiliation, one that participates in and defends Creole/Antillean sovereignty, at least in expression (in linguistic as well as political expression, with both contained in its powerful Creole slogan). However, in this text, liberty becomes a source of violence to the collectivity, enabling the exploitative forces against which Martinicans struggle. Monchoachi shows how a troubled philosophy of liberty that has been championed by the West is at the base of its appropriative ethic:

> "Faire ce qu'on veut." Voilà en effet ce qui caractérise le mieux la liberté telle qu'elle se conçoit à l'époque moderne. Mais où avons-nous pris que la liberté était un exercice qui requérait la mise en œuvre d'une *volonté*? Et d'une volonté *humaine*? Ou même tout simplement, d'où nous vient qu'elle consistât en un exercice (un faire)? Pourtant, c'est bien l'idée qui prévaut ici et là. La liberté est même la valeur suprême inscrite au frontispice des grandes démocraties du monde, les États-Unis et la France, par exemple.
>
> "Do what you want." There it is, the phrase that best characterizes liberty as it is conceived in the modern era. But where did we get the

> idea that liberty is an exercise that requires pursuing one's *will*? Or even a *human* will? In fact, where did we get the idea that it consists in an exercise (an action)? Yet, this is exactly the idea that prevails here, there, and everywhere. Liberty is even the supreme value carved into the frontispiece of the great democracies of the world, like the United States and France. (126)

The liberty that Monchoachi is discussing here is one specific to modernity, again defined according to Western projects of imperial expansion, in collusion with political and capitalist desires. Such an "ideal" coexisted with colonial slavery throughout the renaissance, Enlightenment, and romantic periods in Europe, so incoherence was no stranger to its development. However, even in the era of decolonization, when the practice of empire has supposedly been rejected in a progressive modernity that would have delegitimized the open "exercise" of appropriative "liberties," the colonial practice recurs, even now, in neo-liberal exploitation. Always attentive to language, Monchoachi extrapolates on the ways that liberty, understood as an "exercise of will," is a liberty that is necessarily appropriative, and his etymological analysis, characteristically, seeks its anchor in the Antillean world and its creole-Amerindian episteme. Discussing the second line of the slogan, "Yo pé ké fè sa yo lé adan péyi nou-an" (127), he translates it to French as "Eux point feront/ Cela ils veulent/ à dans le pays nous" ("They in no way will do/ That which they want/ into we country") a distinct version from the prevalent translation, "Ils ne feront pas ce qu'ils veulent dans notre pays" ("They will not do what they want in our country"). He writes,

Nous en percevons à présent mieux l'écho, en même temps que nous éprouvons la tonalité singulière: Yo pé ké fè sa yo lé / (Eux point feront/cela ils veulent). Cet écho qui sourd de la langue, qui va traverser le mouvement de part en part et retentir aux confins, vient étonnamment de très loin: "che*beke*tae n'hacaera" (ils nous ont enlevé de notre terre), disaient déjà les Caraïbes. Il va de soi qu'un tel "étonnement" ne peut pareillement s'éprouver et ne peut pareillement retentir devant un simple manquement aux règles de la libre concurrence mais qu'il s'élève dans le péril extrême d' "enlèvement" auquel l'exercer de la volonté humaine qui s'autoproclame liberté expose le "pays nous."

Exercer vient du latin *arcerer* qui signifie contenir, écarter, et qui a donné naissance à deux séries de vocables: d'une part sur la base *coercerer*, qui veut dire "réprimer"; d'autre part *exercerer*, qui signifie "chasser, ne pas laisser en repos," mais aussi "travailler."

We hear better, now, the echo, just as we sense its singular tone: Yo pé ké fè sa yo lé / (They in no way will do/ that which they want). This echo that booms from the tongue, which will traverse the movement from end to end and reverberate at its boundaries, comes surprisingly from very far away: "che*beke*tae n'hacaera" (they have taken away our land), the Caribs were already saying. It goes without saying that such "surprise" would not be similarly felt and would not similarly resonate before a simple infraction of the rules of free commerce, but that it rises

> up in the extreme peril of the "taking away" to which the exercise of the human will which proclaims itself liberty exposes "we country."
>
> Exercise comes from the latin *arcerer* which means control, send away, and which gives birth to two series of vocables: on one hand on the base *coercerer,* which means, "to repress"; on the other hand exercerer, which means "to hunt, to not leave in peace," but also "to work." (127)

A "modern" notion of liberty, with modern coinciding with the colonial project of Europe in the Americas from 1492 onwards, is held responsible for the unrestrained exercise of human will against both the peoples *and* the earth of the Caribbean, a force of appropriation resisted now as a dispossessing capitalism, but descended from the first appropriative forces that not only stole territory, but separated, "alienated" the people from it.

This appropriative 'liberty,' Monchoachi will later illustrate in his "Éloge de la servilité," comes to be related to the inability to free oneself from the "modern" compulsions of work, money, and success, and is as pervasive among the alienated Antilleans as it is in metropolitan centers of contemporary modernity. He thus critiques directly the neo-liberal ideal of liberty which has become the manifestation of commoditized humanity, identical and reproducible in its empty "diversity." Science and "reality" have contributed to the undoing of any spiritual relationship between the human and the world, which has been reduced to "des utilités ou des futilités" ("utilities and futilities"), rather than "jeu et comme enjeu" ("game and as play";12).

It is through this "jeu" 'game' and "enjeu" 'play' that the performance of alienation-liberty-ecstasy enacts and enables the undoing of the "utilities and futilities" reduction of human activity:

> Il s'agit d'un jeu érotique dont les pièces maitresses sont constituées par la liberté, l'aliénation, et l'extase. Il s'agit d'un jeu subversif dans la mesure où l'extase vient bouleverser la relation convenue entre la liberté et l'aliénation. Comme dans la relation mystique à Dieu, l'aliénation est désirée, elle est sublimée. D'ailleurs la liberté elle-même n'est pas concevable en dehors de cette aliénation…. Etre "hors de soi," c'est très exactement ce que signifie le mot "extase" qui, dans l'érotique comme dans la mystique, subvertit les convenances entre liberté et aliénation.
>
> It is an erotic game in which the master pieces are constituted by liberty, alienation, and ecstasy. It is a subversive game to the extent that the ecstasy disrupts the relationship accorded between liberty and alienation. As in the mystical relationship with God, alienation is desired, it is sublimated. And liberty itself is not conceivable outside this alienation… To be "outside oneself," is exactly what the word "ecstasy" means which, in the erotic as in the mystical, subverts the accord between liberty and alienation. (60)

In this subtle theorization, we see the mise-en -cène of the (post)colonial condition, with the potentially violent (and unchained) "liberty," that pervertable concept here being sought in a purer form in its erotic dance with alienation. What is the possibility

of liberty when alienation is always necessarily, always already part of its act? How does alienation change the terms, the possibility of liberty? Is it still possible to think liberty outside of the appropriative "volonté" 'will' which makes it a producer of alienation, and if so, what form would this disalienating liberty take? It is, indeed, in the impossibility of saying yes to the first part of this last question that the text forces us to confront how, in the absence of a possible reversal of alienation, but also the impossibility of undoing "liberty's" violence or of seeking a purer, uncontaminated version of it, that the performative becomes a necessary compulsion, and only ecstasy (and its excess) can enter as a liberatory possibilities, even if persistently bound to an alienating moment. Triumphal Independence is not the intention here, where "literature,"—this disembodied compromise that is the "exact opposite" of the ideal orality—is what is left to enact the desiring dance between body and word.

Not reading alienation immediately in terms of colonial or Marxist alienation, we might also analyze this "scene" of alienation-liberty as an expression of the liberatory possibilities of alienation from the modern constraints of a neo-liberal episteme. Working out the "liberty" that alienation makes possible, we redefined liberty. Instead of a violently appropriative act of unrestrained will, it becomes instead a de-rationalized liberation that takes the form of ecstasy. Liberty, in this depoliticized context, becomes a condition of a the relationality between body and word naturalized, possible only in the performative dialectical "scene" of expression.

Alienation, then, rather than the psychological baggage of colonization, becomes, in a contemporary moment, the possibility of a liberation from the hegemony of modern, capitalist, "thingification." Alienation would be the counter-

decolonization that must take place, in the second moment of this historicized expression, that takes full account of the *post*colonial condition, that is, one that has assimilated a multi-cultural clause into its consumerist domination. Alienation is the process of transformation that comes about in the project of *becoming* oneself, of translatively "trying on" the ways and means of being of an Antillean non-sovereign collectivity. As the body achieves freedom through the word, but achieves its ecstasy in the continued exchange between "retenue" 'restraint' and "debord" 'excess', so alienation from the self results in collaboration with, rather than domination of, the earth, making possible the liberation of seduction and the eventual ecstasy *disallowed by* contemporary neocolonial consumerism.

Thus alienation becomes part of the liberation, the alienation of performing something or someone else: simultaneously the alienation of postcoloniality, it is also in view of a liberation from the more pernicious (and present) problem, neo-colonial capitalism. This liberating alienation is specifically a *post*colonial kind that, as per Bhabha's splitting, works at a decolonization even as it comes to terms with its coloniality (alienation).

**Conclusion**

The notion of performance that we see in Monchoachi has been juxtaposed with the Créolistes' resistance to political engagement with *créolité* to emphasize that, even in its poeticity, performance in the Caribbean is distinctly political, and no so easily essentialized. The focus on language that we see in Monchoachi allows for a notion of embodied action that is cognitively under analysis and variation, that is complex in its

historicized articulation of a specifically postcolonial Caribbean condition, and that does not escape exegesis through aestheticization, but rather functions within both—within the differed explication of Creole through French, and through the poetic opacities of the literary text. Rather than mystify the meaning of Caribbean political action and performative expression, Monchoachi links them as the dual products of a historical condition that has made performance a valuable cognitive model for thinking political action.

Performance thus reinscribes a mode of conceiving collectivity that does not shy away from the difficult and vulnerable work of political action. This political action is based in the solidarity of sharing a geographic space in a way that conceives of society as not anthropocentric, but rather in equity with its land. In this sense, Monchoachi shies away from the humanist enlightenment focus visible in the work of the Créolistes, who have arguably recycled the same European epistemological legacies that justified colonial and capitalist violence. The structures through which the concepts of liberty and reason had been conceived (concepts that Monchoachi rejects or revises) have been complicit in the violence of expropriation, extermination, and despotic domination that materially attempted to destroy Amerindian legacies just as it necessarily had to erase its challenging epistemological modes of equitable and ecological existence in Caribbean space.

The intention in Monchoachi's articulation of political action for the Antilles is to answer the connected structures of colonial domination, and contemporary neo-liberal exploitation of both space and people. It recuperates and revives Amerindian legacies through its language, and similarly uses Creole language to mount a formidable

challenge to the dominating epistemologies of European powers. However, in its translative, multilingual, and performative perspective, Monchoachi's resistance remains relational, connected to its Western inheritance—even the alienation that this inheritance generated—and with a clear sense of the value of its specific Creole philosophy within a larger discourse of ethics and autonomy. Those aspects of expression that can be perceived as quintessentially Caribbean—rhythm, ritual, repetition, excess, exhibition, and sensuality—are here mobilized as modes of thought, and as modes of a thought that can be productively mobilized by any party that is ready to enter into a collectivity whose solidarity will be based not on essential, primordial identities, but in shared linguistic practice, and by extension, in the "spirit of the place."

# CHAPTER 3

## "ON ÉCRIT D'ABORD POUR SOI"[1] :

## THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MASQUERADE OF MARYSE CONDÉ

> Making a spectacle out of oneself seemed a specifically feminine danger…. a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries… radical negation, silence, withdrawal, and invisibility, and the bold affirmations of feminine performance, imposture, and masquerade (purity and danger) have suggested cultural politics for women.
>
> — Mary Russo

> Grandmother swears by the story of the stones in Ecuador although sometimes she might say Mexico or Venezuela for variety's sake—variety being so much more important than the truth in her opinion. More reliable, she says. Truth changes. Variety remains constant…. We, in this part of the world, have a special veneration for the lie and all its consequences and ramifications. We treat the lie seriously, as a form of horticulture, to be tended and nurtured, all its little tendrils to be encouraged.

[1] "You write, first and foremost, for yourself."

— *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, Pauline Melville

A dedicated reader of Maryse Condé's oeuvre will have read various different versions of the same anecdote that explains how she became a writer. In this story, young Maryse prepares a poem for her mother's birthday, but is so brutally honest about this complex, proud, and often difficult matriarch that she deeply hurt her, drawing tears and the reaction, "C'est ainsi que tu me vois?" ("That is how you see me?"; "Mode d'emploi" 48).[2] Perhaps the slippage between "poem" and "play" across Condé's various accounts of this initiating "oeuvre" should have warned the reader of the questionable veracity of this account, even if the writer insists that this incident was "d'une portée incalculable" ("of immeasurable importance"; 47) or, that "I have no story to fabricate. I am simply going to tell an episode which is my best possible answer on the matter [of how I became a writer]" ("Role of the Writer" 697). In addition to appearing in two of Condé's essays, this anecdote also figures as a story in her semi-autobiographical collection of stories, *Coeur à rire et à pleurer: contes vrais de mon enfance* (*Tales from the Heart: True Stories from My Childhood*; Philcox) published in 1999.[3] Thirteen years later, in her last and most explicitly autobiographical book, *La vie sans fards* (*Life Without Makeup*), Condé tells the story again, this time with heavy use of the conditional tense and qualifying phrases, both of

[2] Different accounts change this exclamation, of course, with the earliest and most divergent one demonstrating less cruel brevity: ""I'm not at all the person you describe," she said. "I am not at all like this"" (Role of the Writer 697)

[3] This work has been translated into English as *Tales from the Heart: True Stories from my Childhood*, but the original title can be literally translated as: "Heart open for laughing or crying: true tales of my childhood." The French idiomatic expression "avoir le coeur à rire" means "in the mood for laughing." The work has since been reprinted in a Pocket edition with a different title, "Le Coeur à rire et à pleurer: Souvenirs de mon enfance," in which the subtitle means "memories of my childhood." The English edition has not changed.

which serve to undermine the truth-status of her statements: "J'aurais environ dix ans. C'était, semble-t-il, un 28 avril…" ("I would have been about ten. It was, apparently, the 28th of April"; 7).[4] This skeptically toned retelling, already notable when the writer is speaking of memories from her life, ends with the surprising but still ambiguous suggestion that the story was inaccurate: "Cette anecdote construite *a posteriori* me semble parfaitement illustrer ces involontaires (?) tentatives d'embellissement que je dénonce" ("This anecdote, conceived *a posteriori,* seems the perfect illustration of those involuntary (?) attempts at embellishment that I denounce"; 8). Doubly calling attention to the instability of her claims with the parenthetical question mark inserted even into this confessional rewriting, this particular retelling echoes revelations that Condé makes, on the previous page, that former stories about her first husband and their marriage were also largely fabrications.

The undecidability of truth and fiction, brought directly to the fore in this last explicitly autobiographical text by Condé, has been a persistent motif throughout her work, starting with her first, semi-autobiographical novel, *Heremakhonon*. Set in Africa, the latter represents, through fiction, Condé's experiences as a Guadeloupean woman of the black bourgeoisie discovering her racial and cultural identity through exile. Leah Hewitt investigates the "tightropes" of reality and fiction that appear in *Hérémakhonon* and that this author has balanced throughout her oeuvre: "If *Heremakhonon* is not autobiography in the strict sense, it is nevertheless a powerful enactment of the way language articulates the multiple, contradictory fictions of the self" (*Tightropes* 171). While for the first half of her career as a writer, Condé refutes

[4] The conditional tense is used to express uncertainty in reporting an event. "Semble-t-il" is a way of formally expressing uncertainty.

claims that her protagonists represent her own story, she eventually begins to claim the fluidity between truth and fiction in her writing, using it paradoxically to reinforce what she sees as the principal value of her work, to "write what [she] believe[s] to be true" (The Role, 697). Most notably, her claims to truth do not attempt to displace the fictive: the very title of *Coeur à rire et à pleurer: Contes vraies de mon enfance* (literally: "Heart to laugh and to cry: True tales of my childhood"), presumably uses the fictional form of "contes" 'tales', to narrate a "true" story, but the "true," paradoxically juxtaposed with "tales," calls attention immediately to questionable truth status. The "conte," meanwhile, is a form that can indicate anything from children's stories, folktales, to fairytales, and it also recalls the oral stories told in the Antilles all while invoking the feminized genre of the European fairytale. A solid dose of irony in the modifier of these tales, "à pleurer" 'to cry', calls into question traditional fairytale ideas of happy endings for women.[5] The simultaneously oblique and direct engagement with "women's problems" (*Maryse Condé, Une voix singulière*)[6] is foregrounded throughout Condé's oeuvre, and is a central aspect of the autobiographical focus of her writings. The autobiography is thus the lens through which she engages with being a woman, and we frequently find her female

[5] This correlation between the term "contes" and fairytales as a female genre draws on Elizabeth Wilson's analysis of the ironic aspects of Condé's *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière*. (110)

[6] Hereafter cited (*Une voix* in text). This film, directed by Jérôme Sesquin, features Condé herself speaking, sometimes to the camera, sometimes in conversation with someone else. Françoise Vergès, the writer, is largely responsible for the film and for instigating the kinds of discussions and monologues that Condé produces. However, since all of the citations that come from the film are Condé's words spoken by herself, I will cite the film by a short version of its name, rather than either that of the director or writer, so as to not create confusion as to whose words I am quoting.

protagonists recuperating various aspects of the cultural identity, intellectual ideals, amorous misadventures, and exilic experiences of Condé's own personal history.[7]

This chapter will make the argument that the feminized life-writing that can be traced throughout Condé's oeuvre, engaged always in a tension between fiction and reality, has been this writer's unique contribution to a performative form in Caribbean literature. Rebellious to the point of opposing all labels and movements that might be imposed by others, Condé constructs a conspicuous role for herself as a provocative and contrarian writer whose oeuvre foregrounds those subjectivities that have been marginalized or reduced to caricatures in Caribbean literary traditions. Having lived most of her own life outside the Caribbean, raised in a bourgeois Guadeloupean family that places her in an uneasy and difficult relationship with the "Creole" culture now seen as representative of the Antilles, her sense of identity has been more influenced by her experiences of foreignness—as a black woman in school in Paris, as a Caribbean woman teaching in Africa, and as a Francophone woman in the USA. Her protagonists also live, for a large part, outside the Antilles, and many who do not are Guadeloupeans that are excluded from "mainstream" creole society. In Condé's stated exploration of the difference/*etrangeté* (foreignness) that she incarnates wherever she lives (even when she returns to Guadeloupe), she has eventually transformed that difference into singularity, a writer's individuality that positions itself in counter-

[7] Condé has repeatedly been unwilling to claim the label "feminist," stating in her interviews with Françoise Pfaff, when asked if she was a feminist, "I have been asked this question a hundred times, and I don't know what it means exactly, so I must not be a feminist…. It is not because you are a woman that you write good books or have essential things to say. There is a danger in believing so…. In my opinion, a writer is a writer, female or male. It's an individual who expresses herself or himself." (29)

distinction to a Creole-language imperative in Antillean letters.[8] Between embodying this rebellion, lending new masks to each manifestation of worldly and local women's subjectivity that her characters take on, and using the fluidity of "truth" as an opportunity for making her subjects alternately visible and invisible, performing, acting, and playing, are central parts of Condé's authorial project.

Each of the three aspects that I have identified as fundamental to Condé's work—writing in a mode of controversy, foregrounding female subjects, and insisting on staying "true" to the individual she considers herself to be—makes her participation in any ideology like that of the Créolistes' out of the question. As Françoise Lionnet has pointed out, even before the advent of *créolité*, "Condé has always refused to be duped by the idealist project of previous generations of Antilleans… with their unproblematic focus on a notion of "cultural identity" which bypasses the often unconscious political realities of life in Guadeloupe" (Autobiographical Voices 188). Indeed, Condé's performance, unlike those texts that perform a specific cultural identity vis-à-vis the rest of the world, is invested more in the exhibition of those elements of local subjectivity that have been rendered invisible in the dominating models of national identity. With her primarily exilic female figures, middle class protagonists, or immigrant heroes, the very absence of a Creole language emphasis in her text is what becomes conspicuous in a cultural climate where

[8] Condé is not absolutely opposed to writing in Creole, and did, after returning to Guadeloupe in 1986, try to embrace what had by then come to be seen as the true expression of French Caribbean culture—a creole sensibility. However, the first novel that takes on this task, *Traversée de la Mangrove,* was dismissed by *créolité* writer Patrick Chamoiseau for a supposed lack of authenticity in his "First reader" address about the book. The control and policing of authenticity, ultimately, of which this incident is exemplary, is representative of what Condé critiques in *créolité*—she questions the prescriptive and authoritative stance it takes socially and institutionally.

"creoleness" has become an imperative, in large part due to the Créoliste manifesto. Condé's non-conformist subjects and characters metonymically give visibility to expressions of marginalized subjectivity that do not find representation within the dominant categories of authenticity.[9]

In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, the conspicuous interplay of Creole and standardized language was central to elaborating a particular notion of cultural identity. However, linguistic play between French and Creole does not take center stage in Condé's work. She does, however, incorporate Creole in those novels that are set in Guadeloupe, even if its inclusion appears, at a first glance, to be more about representation or verisimilitude than about an aesthetic investment in Creole language. The strategies of multilingual writing that she employs with Creole change according to the text, and sometimes change during; for example, in *Coeur à rire*, Creole words and expressions are glossed in the earlier stories, but are frequently left without definitions later on. While my goal is not to generalize Condé's varied practices into a specific linguistic strategy, I submit that, in contradistinction to the works of Créoliste writers, Condé engages in an inverse Creole politics. Creole use for Condé references the Caribbean but is just as autobiographical as much of the subject matter of her writing; thus, given her own limited experience with Creole due to her bourgeois upbringing, Creole does not carry any inherently exhibitive strategies as she

[9] Françoise Lionnet argues, in her discussion of Maryse Condé's novel *Traversée de la Mangrove*, that Condé is indeed producing a form of creole literature that shares certain intentions with the Créolistes. She sees *Traversée* as representative of a "new hybrid language" that Caribbean writers use, and emphasizes, rather than the precision of a purportedly authentic Creole against a clearly demarcated standardized tongue, the importance of the "spectrum" or "continuum" that calls into question a simplified binaristic notion of "diglossia" to describe language practice in the region. (*Postcolonial Representations* 31)

uses it, but foregrounded instead are the social complexities of Creole use for its speakers in their contexts. To illustrate this, I focus on Condé's genre-shifting novel *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* (*Victoire, flavors and words*; translation mine),[10] a text inspired by her creolophone grandmother who almost never speaks in the novel; with this text, I will show how the Creole here becomes the inverse of exhibition. What does makes Creole conspicuous in *Victoire* is the paradoxical *invisibility* it imposes upon those who speak it in the diglossic context. Creole fluency and Creole-French fluidity is revealed to be questionable as a norm, although that is the norm championed in the *créolité* movement. In Condé's work, the silences engendered by creole identity, both in and outside of bourgeois society, are where the conflictual contours of language politics are staged. My analysis of Condé's oeuvre will thus demonstrate how it sketches a compelling limit space for the possibilities of a Creole performance poetics, inviting reflection on the assumptions inherent in the literary engagements we have thus far studied. It will also revisit the distinction between a Creole poetics of representation and one that would be purely aesthetic, the kind of distinction that buttresses categories of fiction as either "ethnographic" if representational or "high culture" if explicitly drawing on European literary traditions. In Condé's use of Creole, representation is central to her politics of Creole language use. It is paradoxically through her style of autobiographical performance, of shifting masks of identity, and of blurring truth and fiction that she is able to call into question the claim to pure "aesthetics" in Créoliste poetics. The complexities of representation become, in her work, its own aesthetics—of provocation, of self-writing, and of authorial

[10] In its English edition, this title was translated as *Victory: My Mother's Mother*

performance. Placing herself at the center of the various autobiographical constructions that are multiplied around her—from her fiction to her essays to the numerous interviews she has given—Condé is able to convincingly stand in and mark the gaps in Creole representation. Creole relationality with French remains central to the effectiveness of this revelation in her work, but the authenticity of authorial performance supersedes the stylized authenticity of an exhibitive Creole nationalism, and exposes its representational flaws. The very notion of authenticity, Condé's work suggests, must go under rigorous revision.

In what follows, I will first attempt to theorize the function of the autobiographical in Condé's oeuvre before showing how she situates herself in the Caribbean canon. As I bring the focus onto the kinds of investments that arise out of her fictionalized engagement with "life writing," the authorial performance she mounts will become visible. The value of this performative contestation in the service of a distinct approach to creole literary practice will then be explored vis-à-vis Condé's engagement with, or avoidance of, Creole-language writing in her contestatory, compelling, and very "woman"[11] oeuvre. In this exploration the word "woman" will be privileged over feminism, a term that Condé has refused along with all other categorizations that can be both restrictive and exclusionary. In choosing the base of "woman" over "feminine," I call to mind the idea of the "willful" that Alice Walker employs in her definition of a womanist (Walker xi).[12] Yet, the -ism of

[11] I have chosen the word "woman" repeatedly instead of "female," "feminine," or "feminist," in part becomes of the various ways in which those terms have been overdetermined, and in part in partial agreement with Elizabeth Wilson's argument that Condé's work is "womanist."

[12] Walker's full definition is the following: Womanist 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk

womanism is itself defined through boundaries, through assertions of truth, through restrictions, so while this analysis shares the spirit of being "serious" and "outrageous," it rejects the label for its imposition of yet another potentially exclusionary category.

**"Une femme dans tout la verite de la nature"—or, What is the truth?**

The epigraph to *La vie sans fards* quotes Sartre: "vivre ou écrire, il faut choisir" ("live or write, one must choose"; 6). If we take it to mean that one must choose between writing and living, its implications for Condé are double. Since *La Vie* describes much of the writer's complicated life, and focuses on the years before she began writing, this quote can be interpreted in a very straightforward way: until her forties, life for Condé was complicated, confusing, difficult, demanding; it was not until she found the peace that came with her second marriage that she could sit down and write about the many difficult experiences she had until then been busy living. Condé tells us as much in one of the first pages of the text: "La principale raison qui explique que j'ai tant tardé à écrire, c'est que j'étais si occupée à vivre douloureusement que je n'avais de loisir

---

expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

pour rien d'autre. En fait, je n'ai commencé à écrire que lorsque j'ai eu moins de problèmes et que j'ai pu troquer des drames de papier contre de vrais drames" ("The main reason I waited so long to start writing is that I was so busy with painfully living that I didn't have the leisure for anything else. In fact, I didn't start writing until I started having fewer problems, and I could trade paper dramas for the real ones"; 9). But there is another implication of this quote from Sartre, one that illuminates the way Condé's writing has functioned over the years. In this interpretation, "il faut choisir" ("one must choose") because life and writing are opposite activities—the written and the lived are, in fact, mutually exclusive. Strangely, these two interpretations fall opposite each other. The first implies that writing is always necessarily derived from the life one is busy living (when not writing)—it implies that writing must be, even if produced with a time lag, at least somewhat autobiographical. The second, however, tells us that life and writing are so necessarily distinct that they cannot converge. It is this seemingly irreconcilable duality, this apparently doubled intention between the practices of living and of writing, that suggests a sure but unknowable distance between Maryse Condé's life (her "truth") and her writing (the artifice that purports to represent said life), and that ultimately yields the characteristic performance that this enigmatic writer repeatedly reproduces in her work.

Of course, the second interpretation of that quote relies on the assumption that whatever Condé writes about her own experiences, is to some degree, untrue. The "nombreuses falsifications" ("numerous falsifications"), which I referenced in opening this chapter become part of the experience of reading Condé: the reader is challenged to decide for herself which of Condé's versions of an autobiographical story tells the

"truth," or more provocatively, to discover that none of them do. In the space between life and fiction is Condé's performance, the appropriation and mythification of the role of the writer such that it can be made to tell her truths. The performance is thus the only potential "truth" there is, and it is inseparable from fiction. When Condé claims she exchanged real dramas for paper ones, she asserts that both life and writing are drama. With both reality and fabrication contributing to her performance, then, the location of truth is no longer easily assimilable to one or the other; whether truth is located in the "real" dramas or the "written" ones, it is in every situation embedded in performance, and the contradiction between performance and truth is thus fundamentally invalidated.

The overt performance in Condé's writing thus indicates the deliberate fabrication of a role: we will find that among other things, this role is one that is emphatically "woman." In this same opening section of *La vie sans fards*, Condé invokes the French tradition of life writing by referencing Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, where he states famously: "Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature ; et cet homme ce sera moi." ("I want to show my peers a man in all the truth of nature; and this man, he will be me"; 1). However, Condé reprises his opening lines with a small but significant difference: it particularizes her confessions as that of a woman: "je veux montrer à mes semblables une femme dans toute la vérité de la nature et cette femme sera moi." ("I want to show my peers a woman in all the truth of nature and this woman will be me"; 7). This, perhaps more than Condé's bourgeois upbringing, her historical moment, or her geographic location, differentiates her positioning from that of any other "neutral"

story of an individual's life. Writing herself into both French and Antillean traditions of letters, Condé's most distinctive and deliberate addition to both is that of a woman's story. As she says in Françoise Vergès' film about her, *Maryse Condé: Une voix singulière* (*Maryse Condé: A Singular Voice*): "Je ne suis pas une africaine, je suis une guadeloupéene. Je suis une femme noire, bien sûr, c'est évident. Je suis un écrivain, oui, aussi. Je suis une femme, une mère de famille, une femme de travail" ("I am not an African woman, I am a Guadeloupean woman. I am a black woman, of course, that's obvious. I am a writer as well, yes. I am a woman, a mother, a working woman.") The last sentence here is the one that carries the least conciliation to an interlocutor, no longer the response to an interviewer's question but direct, intentional, and clearly stated, the final word in this brief self-presentation. The insistence on her gender and its various roles in this statement, I would argue, is exemplary of the place her own life has in her writing, and of the way self-presentation becomes imbricated in her fiction.

In *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*, Leigh Gilmore notes that autobiographical writing by women was traditionally delegitimized in European literature, following the tradition of female "confessions" that were controlled and censored. To begin with, authority was inherent in confession, an authority that has transferred to the genre of autobiography: "The confession's persistence in self-representation and the meaning attributed to that persistence largely structure authority in autobiography. As a mode of truth production the confession in both its oral and written forms grants the autobiographer a kind of authority derived from the confessor's proximity to "truth" (108). In a social context where truth is

disallowed or unexpected from women, where women writing or speaking about themselves are dismissed on the grounds that their "truths" might not meet the requirements of social gender constructs, the confession provides the grounds for bringing female stories forward within the structures of authority. Accordingly, as Gilmore notes, "Mysticism (confessions)… was practiced largely by women" (119). Meanwhile, this subversive appropriation of the authority available in the confession was not without its own mechanisms of control, "The confession installs the production of gender as a truth effect; one tells the truth insofar as one also produces gendered identity appropriately" (112). The authority granted in confession was dependent on the correlation between the mystic's behavior and their expected gender roles. Even while it offered the occasion to claim authority not normally afforded women, female confessions were censored so as not to disrupt existing gender hierarchies. In the invocation of a controlled but powerful medium through which women could speak for themselves and exercise authority in it, Gilmore connects the contemporary woman's autobiography to that underlying subversive potential in confessional practice.

In invoking Rousseau's *Confessions*, but overtly changing his subject to that of a "woman," Condé invokes a gendered history of confessions through which women's censorship is referenced. The gendering of her discourse thus lies not merely in the gender of her "I" and the engagement with questions specific to women's lives, but also in the very structure and form of the discourse, the history (French literary, if not directly clerical and mystical) in or against which it inscribes itself. Condé's truths serve multiple purposes, functioning as a revelation of herself and also of a certain

mode of being a woman—rebellious, opinionated, unconventional.[13] Indeed, this rebellion is itself inscribed in the tradition, despite the control under which it functioned. For example, Gilmore shows that "the evident "thematic of regulation" in spiritual confessions enabled the one confessing to develop alternative and rewarded "competencies" in "telling the truth"" (108). In direct challenge to the "thematic of regulation" produced more sinisterly by the gendered literary norms of her Antillean context, Condé's own manipulation of reality and fiction serves the performative purpose of bringing women's writing into being, and does so by inventing its own strategies of telling or confession, by adopting forms that betray "alternative competencies."

Many of Condé's protagonists are women, each contributing to the role she has assembled for her own woman-author persona. And as she engages with French life-writing directly, she makes explicit the specificity of her contribution in her reprisal of the well-known Rousseau citation—that of a woman entering a literary tradition dominated by men. Her contribution signals difference more broadly however, as it takes Rousseau's emblematic representation of "man," and calls into question its universal applicability. As such, this particular transformation of confession and autobiography powerfully troubles hegemonic frameworks within literary traditions more generally by revealing, in this genre, the historical and ongoing inscriptions of these traditions into categories invested with discursive power, in this case its

[13] The critical volume *Maryse Condé: rébellions et transgressions* collects essays addressing the multiple aspects and functions of rebellion in Condé's work, including discussions of her resistance to *créolité* prescriptions, her stance as a woman writer defying conventions, and the wealth of characters that she has privileged who are themselves persistently in defiance of social and cultural norms. It also includes an interview with Condé herself.

gendering as male. Her woman characters are thus not only challenges to the gendering of this tradition as male, but multiply interrogate other exclusionary literary and cultural "traditions" from her geographic context: they are exilic, frequently middle class, and far from the exalted and symbolically dominant "potomitan" figures of the creole woman.[14] They stand against skewed notions of culture where the black working class male is fixed at the center, a center that continues to use that hierarchical claim to "tradition" to control what female power could resemble. Condé's stated influences, consequently, performatively refuse tradition and controlling literary genealogies, relying less on the perceived canonical writers of the Francophone Caribbean, and seeking inspiration among black writers of North America, Anglophone writers of the Caribbean, British woman writers, and even white male writers, like Tennessee Williams, a kindred spirit for his history of a troubled and spectacular marginalization. Tradition, or stifling prescriptions based in geography, race, culture, or gender, is the enemy of Condé's oeuvre.[15]

**A Woman against the Créolistes**

Writing as a woman is but one way in which Condé's position and oeuvre differs from the Créolistes' invented tradition. Always committed to exploring the experiences of the marginalized, she locates among her influences two of her Antillean forebears who

[14] The "potomitan" is the Creole term for a strong, courageous mother figure, the archetype of the black woman as the fierce center and support of the Creole family (poteau mitan means, literally, central pillar), itself understood as materially poor and culturally rich. This figure, it must be noted, does not indicate a matriarchal society. It has become a rather important symbolic archetype in contemporary Creole literature and a recognizable literary figure in the French Caribbean, along with the figure of the "femme matador," which, as outlined by Louise Hardwick, differs from the potomitan in being a childless woman who is credited with "masculine" characteristics.

[15] I understand tradition here through the broad definition provided by Eric Hobsbawm, as the repetition of certain practices so that they become dominant values and constitute a norm.

also largely differ from, or are rejected by the Créolistes: Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. In an interview about her literary influences, after naming Brontë, Mishima, and Duras, she evokes Césaire,

> … qui m'a appris que je n'étais pas une française, que je n'étais pas une urbaine, que j'étais d'un autre monde et qu'il fallait apprendre à déchirer les mensonges, à regarder derrière ce que j'avais appris pour arriver à découvrir la vérité de ma société et de moi-même. Aimé Césaire, c'est une sorte de révélation sur ce qu'un colonisé peut porter à lui-même."
>
> … who taught me that I was not a French woman, that I was not urbane, that I was from another world and that I needed to learn to tear up the lies, to see through what I had been taught in order to be able to discover the truth of my society and myself. Aimé Césaire was a sort of revelation on what a colonized person could do to himself. (*5 Questions*)

In other moments, Condé would credit Césaire and the Négritude movement with teaching her that she was part of a "monde noir" ("world of black people"), a fact that her bourgeois education in Guadeloupe had not permitted her to understand. Her discovery of Fanon then marks a second moment where, after drawing on her pan-Africanist identity learned from Négritude, she came to valorize more an individualized consciousness of her humanity:

> Fanon, au contraire, dit, le nègre est une invention d'Europe. S'il n'y avait pas l'Europe, s'il n'y avait pas le monde blanc… nous sommes tous très différents, nous avons chacun d'entre nous des choses

> différentes à porter au monde. Donc finalement, il a détruit le socle de la négritude qui est l'identité commune des noirs… Je suis devenue tellement fanonienne que ça a en fait éclipsé tout le reste.
>
> Fanon, on the other hand, says "the negro is an invention of Europe. If there were no Europe, if there were no white world… we are all very different, we each bring something different into the world. So ultimately, he destroyed the basis of Négritude, which is the shared identity of black people… I have become so Fanonian that it has actually eclipsed everything else. (*Une voix*)

This Fanonian anti-essentialism is at the core of Condé's refusal to participate in the Créoliste project. More than a rejection of their ideology, her critique rather seeks to "revendiquer le droit à son espace imaginaire" ("reclaim the right to her own imaginative space"; Cottenet-Hage 166). Reclaiming her own space as a writer also goes hand in hand with Condé's claiming of Fanon and Césaire, seen as passé according to contemporary debates on Antillean culture; Condé unabashedly reaffirms the authorial authenticity that would eventually pitch her against the Créolistes. In claiming her debt to Césaire, even when her approximation to Fanon takes her away from his ideas, Condé is obliquely refusing to participate in the outright rejection of a Négritude poetics, a strategy that helps new movements carve the space of their own importance in Antillean letters. In her own description of her shift from a Césaire-Négritude perspective to that of a "fanonienne" she reclaims her individual authenticity as distinct from the kinds of movements that build themselves on reductive rejections of their forebears. Calling upon Césaire and Fanon

simultaneously, Condé invokes the very forefathers of Antillean letters that the Créolistes have rejected or ignored, renewing her career-long commitment to a producing a provocative, individual oeuvre, even if it is ultimately incompatible with the Créolistes' new Creole-based, Glissantian philosophy.

In "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," Condé, responding to the new Créolistes that had declared her work inauthentic, presents a history of Antillean literature where, at various key moments, the new movement in vogue reinvents and reinvests with fanfare what ends up being a relatively stable Antillean literary genealogy. She illustrates the repeated attempts to controls what kind of writing, what questions, and what characters could be legitimately called Antillean, as well as the paradoxically repetitive attempt to assert that each group's new perspective meant that Antillean literature was but just about to begin. Condé extracts and glosses a list of "criteria" from the *Légitime Défense,* written in 1934 by a group of anti-colonial and marxist Martinican students in Paris:

> 1. Individualism was chastised. Only the collectivity had the right to express itself. 2. The masses were the sole producers of Beauty, and the poet had to take inspiration from them. 3. The main, if not the sole, purpose of writing was to denounce one's political and social conditions, and in so doing, to bring about one's liberation. 4. Poetic and political ambition were one and the same. (153)

In every way, these directives run against how Condé positions herself as a writer. Not coming from the masses, she found value in exploring the complex black bourgeois social class within which she was raised, an essential source for her critical

positioning, and the position which nurtured her ability to see, understand, and analyze herself and her country. Not knowing the culture of the masses, she was both unable and unhurried to take inspiration from them only, writing instead from her own experiences. And while the range of Condé's texts stages both the possibilities and limitations of being political, recounting her various encounters with radical political movements in the negotiation of empire and decolonization, she ultimately relies on her broad lived experiences in the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, and North America to carve out a unique and individualist poetics. Far from apolitical, Condé nonetheless refuses to define her work according to any community too defined in its contours, and this emerges in her perspective on language: "La langue dans laquelle j'écris n'est pas le français, ce n'est pas le créole, je le dis souvent. C'est une langue qui est la mienne. J'écris en Maryse Condé" ("The language in which I write is not French, it is not Creole, I always say. It is a language that is mine. I write in Maryse Condé"; *Une voix*)

Condé's individuality thus pits her against the most recent literary activists of the Antilles, the Créolistes, and her individuality is also one that is markedly woman, which is the lens through which she critiques them. Following her presentation of *Légitime Défense,* and after extracting both the main points of Jacques Romain's and Edouard Glissant's respective recommendations for Antillean literature, she gives us her summary of the Créolistes:

> 1. The characters are not confined to the usual trilogy: béké (white planter)/black man/mulatto. (For instance, Raphael Confiant introduces an East Indian, up to now the forgotten soul of Guadeloupean and Martinican literature.) 2. Sexuality (especially in Confiant's novel) is no

> longer absent, but is exclusively male sexuality. 3. The male characters (women remain confined to stereotypical or negative roles) don't have the messianic ambition to modify their world, like Manuel for instance. On the contrary, in *Chronique des sept misères*, Patrick Chamoiseau presents a deliberate satire of the "revolutionary behavior" of a female student (159).

Having already lingered on the embarrassing patriarchy glorified in Romain's *Gouverneurs de la Rosée,* Condé reveals that on this count little progress has been made by his successors in the Créolistes; moreover, the irony expressed in her description of Confiant's heavy-handed corrective, by including marginal subjectivities in the East Indian as "forgotten soul," is hard to miss. Condé centers the bulk of her discussion of Caribbean literary trends in this essay, however, on an analysis of a certain unwanted "disorder" that woman writers have consistently brought to the table through their representations of the harsh and unheroic truths of Antillais life: "Whenever women speak out, they displease, shock, or disturb. Their writings imply that before thinking of a political revolution, West Indian society needs a psychological one" (162). Going further, Condé grounds her critique directly in the lived experiences of women that are excluded from Antillean canonical representations: "Due to the absenteeism and irresponsibility of the fathers, the victimized mothers are forced to be the bread-winners and to assume the education of the children. However, in spite of this sociological reality, we have been fed upon triumphant portrayals of messianic heroes coming back home to revolutionize their societies" (163). The thrust of Condé's critique here lies in what she sees as the

difficulty to achieve freedom in Antillean writing in favor of glorious narratives that essentialize and idealize selected cultural symbols repackaged as the only "truth." These prescriptions work against the writer's potential to critique and transform the society by representing its realities. Quoting Julio Cortazar, Condé defends a different model based in "freedom": "It is the destiny of literature to provide for beauty. It is its duty to provide for truth in this beauty."[16] Speaking of her work alongside compatriot Myriam Warner-Vieyra's, she again evokes "truth": "Those who want to veil their faces before the harsh realities of Africa cannot accept our truth" (164). "Our" truth, understood as a woman's sharp eye to reality, also suggests the courage to not rehearse the idealizing myths of Africa that are promoted in Antillean writing. For Condé, no imposed communal narratives can come in the way of the myriad and complex experiences that, for her, describe her individual, woman's life. As she rejects an authenticity based in an essentializing local identity for one that is revealed consistently through the examples of women writers, the irreducible individuality that is the basis of her own authorial authenticity comes to be defined, and exemplified, by the women she cites. Indeed, at the base of Condé's argument here is the subtle suggestion that woman writers are the best representatives of creative "authenticity" in the Caribbean. Condé thus masterfully claims a woman subjectivity without subscribing to a "category" of women; instead, she transforms the work of women into individual sources but consistently critical, truthful, and authentically imaginative

[16] Julio Cortazar, cited in "Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer"

representations of the Caribbean—and she does this by providing numerous examples for analysis, rather than make a generalizable or essentializing claim to this effect.[17]

**Imitation and Influence, non-Creole**

To say, "J'écris en Maryse Condé" ("I write in Maryse Condé"), is to refuse memberships that require her relationship to Creole to be glorifying, liberating, and contestatory. Not writing in Creole is one way of not writing into the Créoliste ideology, and consequently, it is to write the woman, to write the black alienated bourgeoisie, to write the exile. Condé continues to reaffirm Césaire even while the Créolistes have deemed his Négritude destructive for not using Creole and for being too fixated on "external" truths. In her refusal to dismiss all that lies outside the Creole-language world, Condé names female and homosexual authors from England (Brontë), France (Duras), and Japan (Mishima) as her main literary influences. She seeks "external" models, and she describes the influence of African-American writers on her work as more important than those from the Antilles.[18] Formally, her autobiographical stories in *Coeur à rire* have more in common with Trinidadian V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street*, where a similar anecdotal structure combines with similar themes: an account of childhood in the Caribbean, the cultural and educational limits of life on a island, and an emotionally complex departure—more similarities than she could find with Patrick Chamoiseau's stories of childhood *Antan d'enfance*. In the

[17] Condé directly invokes writers Michèle Lacrosil, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Myriam Warner-Vieyra, as well as Mayotte Capécia and Suzanne Lacascade. But she also supports her claim with sociological writings and evidence of the discomfort many of these women writers inspire in their critics.
[18] In an interview, ""I Have Made Peace With My Island": An Interview with Maryse Condé, VèVè A. Clark and Cecile Daheny," Condé asserts that while she likes writing by Antillean writers, they were not an influence, but that Afro-American writers, in particular women, were.

most important divergence from Chamoiseau and similarity to Naipaul, Condé's narrator desires to and eventually leaves the Antilles; Chamoiseau's reveals no such intention. As her husband and translator Richard Philcox noted, meanwhile, her similarities with Naipaul are far-reaching.[19]

This same collection of stories, which were likely all composed with "a posteriori" intentions of "embellishment," as we have seen in the negotiation of untruth in Condé's life-writing practices, gives us one short story that directly references Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye*. The title is "The brownest eye," and the story tells of a childhood romance between Maryse and a little boy where love fails because both copy the European literary and epistolary models that they know, models inapt to their context and to the realities of Condé's not-blue eyes. This story suggests a critique of outside influences and a refusal of the alienation that it imposes. However, if the dramatically romantic correspondence of these children follows the logic of many anecdotes in this book—such as the one where she hurts her mother's feelings with her brutal honesty—it is in the personal failures that complicate her relationships that Condé situates the enduring influences of her literary vocation. Another such situation of being too truthful, in another story, costs young Maryse her best childhood friend. Telling the truth has thus always gotten her into trouble, but she has also made it the crux of her career as a writer. Meanwhile, the "imitation" of colonial models represented here, with the concept of imitation reviving an old debate

[19] In his discussion of strategies for translating *Traversée de la Mangrove*, Condé's translator and husband Richard Philcox points so the various similarities between Condé's work and Naipaul's that almost led him to use the latter as a stylistic model: "[les] ressemblances de ton… [le] cynisme… la demystification et au plaisir à déplaire qui existent entre Condé et Naipaul" ("[the] similarities of tone… [the] cynicism… the demystification and the pleasure for displeasing that exist with both Condé and Naipaul"; "Traduire "Traversée de la Mangrove"" 222).

about the value of the postcolonial writer who reprises, or even "imitates" metropolitan writing, is a mode that Condé does not refuse entirely, embracing metropolitan influence through a sustained intertextuality—both with her rewriting of Brontë in *Windward Heights*, and in the numerous chapter titles in *La vie sans fards* that directly reference a broader creative and literary world: *One flew over the cuckoo's nest*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Proust.

Finally, Condé complicates the meaning of alienation from the first story in *Un Coeur a Rire*, "Portrait de famille" ("Family Portrait"), a story that initiates the reader into an interrogation of the fundamental precepts of postcolonial expression by presenting Condé's deeply Francophile parents but asking at the end of the account if acting according to what they truly believed, according to a certain pride of race, meant so clearly that they were, indeed, "alienated." By questioning what would normally be an easy diagnosis, the same that her rebellious brother—and the rebellious Condé in *Heremakhonon*—offers, the story raises the question of how these classic precepts of post-coloniality tend to be reiterated, reified, and returned upon the writer. Condé's text asks, without answering, if imitation, finally, need always be condemned, and further, if imitation, in varied and complex forms, were not intrinsic to Antillean society and to its creative process. Outside of the failure of childish interracial love that it occasions in "The Brownest Eye," has imitation in Condé's oeuvre not led to other, more valuable "missteps," such as the heavy and sometimes controversial referentiality of *Heremakhonon* and *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière*, or furthermore, a well-developed sense of performance that launches from imitation into a more complexly exuberant performativity?

It is worth noting, at this point, the prevalence of English language influences in Condé's oeuvre. American, frequently, but also British, the inter-texts of the Anglophone world are frequently marked in Condé's work through language, as she frequently leaves them in English in her otherwise French text, as she does with "The Brownest Eye." Entering her text through this translative mode of opacity, the English language and Anglophone influences create an supplemental mask to the irreducible subjectivity that Condé constantly reaffirms, a mask that can be read for exile, for cosmopolitanism, for literary influence, for proximity to North America, and the powerful influences of an Anglophone globalization. Yet the English also marks geographic and intellectual situatedness, Condé's own residence in the US and her place in its academic institutions since 1985. Most importantly, however, the English that enters into the French text the way Creole often enters another Antillean's writing, in translative interchange with the French language, undermines the assumption that language always represents culture and nation in a straightforward way. This English does, perhaps, the same interruptive, intrusive work that Creole might perform elsewhere, but its value is not automatically contestatory. In fact, in its multiple possibilities of signification, multilingual poetics is revealed here as a very fluid and politically indeterminate gesture—broadly translatable—yet the one clear effect of its use is the expansion of the value and meaning of language in literature past the geographically and culturally specific.

One effect of the above is to complicate the politics of writing in French for a Caribbean writer, where French figures as the language of high culture and domination, the standard that in being displaced by a formerly disregarded Creole

tongue. In this case, English is the foreign intrusion, and French becomes the home or native tongue being challenged instead of Creole. The second effect is to shift the focus of Condé's literary intention away from language as meaning, instead using language as the marker of a new dynamics. For example, English reinforces the relation to Toni Morrison, but also shifts the question of race and skin color, of women's negotiation of beauty within a complex society with racialized hierarchies, into one that engages the Americas more broadly. In what ways might the American intellectual history on questions of race and the types of questions it asks lend depth to the problems of social discrimination in the Antilles? In particular, in what ways is this conversation still basic and necessary in a "creole" Antilles, one in which *créolité* evacuates the language of "race," disallowing its engagement either socially or aesthetically?

**Fictional performances**

Condé's literary work, I have been trying to show, comes from the experiences that have shaped her own life, some directly so. Readings of her oeuvre from this perspective have been ongoing, even before the publication of her most explicitly autobiographical works (*Coeur à rire et à pleurer,* 1999*; Victoire, les saveurs et les mots,* 2008*;* and *La vie sans fards*, 2012*)*, as per Leah Hewitt's 1990 study of *Hérémakhonon* as autobiographical writing in *Autobiographical Tightropes*, and the early multiplication of extended interviews engaging with her life, of which Françoise Pfaff's book *Conversations with Maryse Condé* is exemplary. However, even in the texts that cannot be explicitly connected to Condé's subjectivity as a black

Guadeloupean woman of bourgeois upbringing, the blurring of truth or reality with fiction has been an ongoing node of interest. The posture of expression that is both on a tangent from and an extrapolation of the self figures a tightly controlled but very transgressive performance.

For example, in a thoughtful discussion of the irony and parody framing Condé's novel *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière,* Elizabeth Wilson insists that:

> On sent le besoin de créer de nouveaux mythes, de nouvelles versions de l'"Histoire." Mais en même temps, Tituba (et Condé) démythifie(nt) et remet(tent) en question ses (leurs) propres versions. Par conséquent, parodie et ironie jouent un rôle crucial dans l'ouvrage pour le modèle complexe de significations organisé par Condé.
>
> One senses a need to create new myths, new versions of "History." But at the same time, Tituba (and Condé) demystify and call into question her (their) own versions. As a result, parody and irony play a crucial role in the work, in the complex model of meanings that Condé has created. (106-107)

The duality between truth and fiction here takes on a meaning that is of wider reach than Condé's life and memory: it is an aspect of her entire oeuvre's attempt to engender a literary corpus that prevents fictions from becoming sweeping, representative myths. Wilson locates this diligent irreverence in the gap between theme and its treatment in *Tituba*, "Celle-ci traite des questions extrêmement sérieuses avec une désinvolture ironique qui est par moments moqueuse, par moments ambivalente et même par moments les rejette carrément… repoussant insidieusement

les idéologies rassurantes" ("She addresses extremely serious questions with an offhanded irony that is at times mocking, other times ambivalent, and even, sometimes, completely rejects them… stealthily refusing reassuring ideologies"; 107). This in-text staging of a range of attitudes, dramatizing and dismissing the questions that the reader expects answered, flamboyantly privileges the performance over its meaning.

Wilson points out the very need to probe the deliberate lie of the text: "Jusqu'à quel point peut-on faire confiance à l'Histoire? Jusqu'à quel point peut-on faire confiance à Tituba en tant que narratrice? Jusqu'à quel point peut-on croire à son histoire ? Raconter une histoire est-ce raconter "des histoires"? ("What's the limit for trusting History? What's the limit for believing her story? Is telling a story "telling stories?""; 107).[20] More than a need to uncover and share the answers to these questions, Condé's œuvre, Wilson suggests, serves more to make visible the complexity hidden behind any pose towards truth than to offer clear answers.

Part of putting into question the very notion of heroic ideals, Condé foregrounds through her protagonists her own weakness: the need to be liked, seen, and recognized: "Tituba est obsédée par la peur de l'effacement. Que les esclaves finissent par faire des chants à son sujet lui remonte le moral. Condé semble parodier le dilemme antillais alors même qu'elle le reconnaît" ("Tituba is obsessed with the fear of erasure. That the slaves end up making up chants about her raises her spirits. Condé seems to parody the Antillean dilemma even as she recognizes it"; 111). The Antillean dilemma that Wilson references might have to do with the dilemma of exile,

[20] As Wilson indicates in her essay, the Jamaican phrase "telling stories" in her native Jamaica can mean "lying."

of possibly losing one's roots. Or it might be that of the French islands at risk of having their culture disappear, wiped out by metropolitan French influence. But we also legitimately read, through this character, Condé's own desire to be noticed, to have her self and her work recognized. As Madeleine Cottenet-Hage remarks in an introduction to a conference on the novelist: "La psychologie est toujours plus complexe qu'elle ne le paraît et l'écrivain Maryse Condé ne se livrerait sans doute pas aussi volontiers à l'entretien s'il n'existait chez elle un désir de se faire aimée et acceptée" ("Psychology is always more complicated than it appears, and the writer Maryse Condé would not agree so willingly to an interview if there were not some desire in her to be liked and accepted"; 171). In parallel, we know that Condé was hurt by the lack of recognition received when she attempted to live in Guadeloupe many years after first leaving: "Sans être prétentieuse ou me prendre au sérieux, j'aurais aimé être entourée d'un minimum de respect, de reconnaissance. Et j'en ai eu assez d'être considérée comme … négligeable, pas importante, d'être jamais sollicitée pour rien… Mais j'aurais aimé être reconnue et aimée chez moi" ("Not to be pretentious or to take myself too seriously, but I would have liked to be surrounded by at least a little respect or recognition. I'd had enough of being treated as… negligeable, unimportant… of never being asked to do anything… I would have like to be recognized and loved at home"; Une voix). In Condé's writing, the desire for recognition goes hand in hand with the contestatory spirit she brings to all her work, the desire for provocation and the reactions she almost expects from it: "Il est certain que j'ai souvent rêvé de choquer mes lecteurs en dégonflant certaines boursouflures. Plus d'une fois, j'ai regretté que des flèches contenues dans mes textes n'aient pas

étaient perçues" ("It is true that I've often dreamed of shocking my readers by puncturing certain swellings. More than once, I've been disappointed that the arrows in my texts were not noticed"; *La vie sans fards* 8)

**Autobiographical Dramas**

In an unabashed way, Condé presents her relationship with writing as one that seeks dramatic results; this theatricality, furthermore, contributes to the image she offers of herself, the construction of an authorial persona that is supplemented and expanded with each interview, as with each new narrative that features a strong female protagonist with a penchant for making a contrarian scene, quite like Condé herself. Evelyn Hinz proposes that drama should be taken as the literary model whose form best approximates biography. Her meticulous elaboration of this argument, based in Aristotle's theory of tragedy, lists a number of ways in which the intention, rhythm, and reception of life writing reproduces the structure of the theatre:

> For despite their disparateness and variety, auto/biographical documents do have three basic features in common: an element of conflict and dialogue, a sense of performance and/or spectatorship, and a mimetic or referential quality… one notes that these are also the major characteristics of drama—and, moreover, that drama shares with auto/biography an interdisciplinary dimension and a catholicity of appeal (192).

A significant cross-section of Condé's oeuvre is autobiographical—whether explicitly so or not—, semi-autobiographical, strongly self-referential, or accompanied by a

multitude of interviews and essays that focus on her life. Interpreting this concentration of life-writing through Hinz's claim, we see how Condé's persistence at troubling the particular contours of the truth throughout her writing fits this critic's notion of the autobiographical quite well: "in drama and life writing, what we delight in is a sense that the subject can never be pinned down, that what we are witnessing is a performance, and that what is being imitated can never be fully expropriated or superseded by the copy" (199). Condé's staging of her own life in text and her consistent return to autobiographical themes compel us to consider that throughout her oeuvre, in its various translations of whatever "original" the author's life might have been, what we read is a carefully directed and produced performance that highlights those aspects of the self that the author deems valuable—that will bring the recognition which she seeks, in part through the contestation she performs. Hinz says, "The concept of the persona… is central to autobiography, and its dynamics are best understood by way of its functioning in drama" (201).

Condé has a propensity for writing a certain dramatic quality into her fiction, and her increasing focus on life-writing certainly places her as the central persona in her oeuvre. Dramatic declarations like, "Celle que j'avais été n'etait plus" ("She who I once was, was no more"; *La vie sans fards* 13) abound in her narrations. The mise-en-scène of many of the moments of her life, their theatricality, perhaps necessary to a successful narration, is nonetheless remarkable for how its dramatic devices transform lived experience into plot, staged as fiction. As Hewitt notes "Condé transforms the autobiographical issues of her novel into an exemplary performance of the personal" (*Tightropes* 162). Whether Condé openly "told stories" about her life or not, the

dramatic value of a literary performance that life writing incorporates carries a very specific notion of truth:

> Aristotle's theory that the protagonists in drama should be true to life and yet truer than life provides ancient precedent for postmodernist theories concerning the fictionality of autobiography. Similarly it is in terms of Aristotle's emphasis upon the evolutionary consequences of such idealized mimesis that one best addresses the current argument that in rewriting the past the autobiographer changes the self of the present and projects its future." (205)

In its shifts and shuttling between versions, forms, or outcomes, the various stories that are known of Condé's life certainly figure whichever role would best represents her exceptionality, contingent upon the demands of the moment and her shifting purpose. These textual performances, however, are no less valuable than a text that might seem more explicitly "true." Hewitt's explores in detail the various subjectivities being navigated by Condé: "Condé makes us aware that the artificial constructions of the self, in all its contradictory poses, are valid and real. As an Antillean woman writer, she lays claim to a fictive, multicultural genealogy that she produces and that produces her in turn." (200). Even as Condé resists the idealizing construction of the various forms of Caribbean writing that have engaged in censoring and controlling the region's literature, her own narratives, themselves unable to commit to "truth" conceived as reality, are idealized projections of a different kind. In textually performing invented selves, Condé becomes exemplary of a mode of being Antillean that never stops putting on masks. Speaking of various women

autobiographers, Hewitt confirms that "Not only do these writers attest to the notion of autobiography as distortion, they also make us suspect that reality is somehow always already bound up in distortions and fabrications" (201), an observation only too valid for understanding Condé's work. But rather than remain with the negative term of "distortion" that still retains the idea of a modified truth, I prefer to pursue the validating concept of performance in Condé's oeuvre, as a way of keeping reality—still a valuable criteria for her womanist politics—together with the undecidability of cultural and social identity.

**Maryse masquerade**

While Condé affirms time and again that she was unable to experience and appreciate Carnival masquerade as a young woman in Point à Pitre, Daniel Maximin asserts in a conference about her work that "le "Guadeloupéen est habitué au masque" de par son histoire colonial" ("the "Guadeloupean is a habitué of the mask" because of his colonial history").[21] Without suggesting that Condé's mode of performative writing necessarily expresses a Guadelopean essence, I hold onto Maximin's representation of masquerade performances as a response to hostile social circumstances as application to her—even in this postcolonial context rich with literary and cultural movements and debates through which the native writer must work out her path. Madeleine Cottenet-Hage alternates, in her astute analyses of Condé's interviews over the years, between seeing a woman who is difficult to penetrate, and a figure who has various faces: "Or Maryse Condé résiste au dévoilement. En ce sens, elle est bien de la race de ces

[21] Cited in a note to "Traversée" by Cottenet-Hage, (171).

écrivains pour qui le recours à l'écriture est un masque qui permet de dire sans se trahir" ("But Maryse Condé resists unveiling. Because of this, she is firmly in the category of writers for whom the recourse to writing is a mask that permits speaking without betraying the self"; 158) At the conclusion of her presentation, Cottenet-Hage speculates :

> Cette image de solidité serait-elle un masque ? Il est un terme que je n'ai pas inclus dans mon petit lexique des thèmes, celui *d'errance*… Cette errance qui a marqué son histoire et qui pouvait sembler négative, elle la juge désormais "bénéfique et féconde" car elle mène à la créativité. Cependant cette errance choisie, non imposée, pourrait-elle désigner la fêlure qui nous rapproche de la femme, nous permette d'entrevoir l'inquiétude, l'inachevé, la réconciliation toujours différée avec un lieu où elle déposera/ait ses bagages ?
>
> Would this image of solidity be a mask? There is a term that I have not included in my little lexicon of themes, that of *errancy*… This errancy that has marked her life and that might seem negative, she deems "beneficial and fecund" because it leads to creativity. However this chosen errancy, unimposed, could it be the rift that brings us closer to the woman, allowing us to glimpse the unquiet, the unfinished, the perpetually deferred reconciliation with a place where she will/would set down her bags? (170)

Cottenet-Hage reads the masquerade through which she theorizes Condé's authorial pose as, finally, a combination of "solidity" and wandering that makes every

encounter with her deferred/differed. The plurality that has come to be read as the core of Condé's commitment to a diverse and transformative world can be understood, according to Cottenet-Hage, as the multiplication of masks, quite like the multiplication of her story into her various protagonists, several of whom reference the author herself, and the resulting impossibility of fixing her into one place, to one identity: for Condé the truth is unlocatable. Cottenet-Hage observes, "L'interviewée [Condé] pressent les réponses que l'on voudrait obtenir d'elle ; elle résiste" ("The interviewee [Condé] senses the answers that we want from her; she resists"; 165)

The extraordinary revelations made with the publication of Condé's *La vie sans fards,* the most explicitly autobiographical publication by the writer, include access to a range of Condé's experiences that do not shy away from narrating her most private reactions to what happens around and to her. In describing her arrival to Côte d'Ivoire in 1959 at the age of twenty-two, she recounts how she lies about her past when she unexpectedly encounters a former teacher who, for Condé, was part of the bourgeois life that she had left behind in Guadeloupe. The teacher immediately expresses shock and disappointment at seeing her former star student arrive in Côte d'Ivoire to fill a teaching post with little prestige, and Condé responds with characteristic aplomb: "Ce ton apitoyé me déplut. J'expliquais avec désinvolture que j'avais été saisi d'un violent désir de changer ma vie trop bien réglée. J'avais donc planté là mes études et étais partie pour l'Afrique" ("That pitiful tone irritated me. I explained offhandedly that I had suddenly felt a powerful desire to change my overly regulated life. So I abandoned my studies and left for Africa."; 29)

We might read this confession as insight into how many of the untruths, or rather all the "embellishments," that we see throughout Condé's oeuvre come to be. This particular episode showcases how many of the characteristics Condé has generated about herself have emerged out of the necessity to escape the restriction of expectations placed on her, but also to come to terms with the secrets that she hid as either shameful or unpleasant until now. This abrupt response reprises the same role that we see Condé performing over the years—the outspoken rebel, the intellectual dissatisfied with her stifling bourgeois lot. But here, that performance is revealed as an act, and we also see that the brave and intractable Maryse Condé was also sensitive, proud, and embarrassed at having failed to meet her bourgeois potential. In the aftermath of this revelation, the "autobiographical" but contradicting story she had told in *Coeur à rire* of frivolously having left school because she had merely lost interest becomes poignant, in the revelation that Condé could not own the truth, told in *La vie sans fards,* of having been impregnated, abandoned, and unable to finish her studies.

Throughout this text we see that disapproval continually affects Condé's choices—she remembers well and resents her Parisian sisters' disapproval, shame, and discomfort at her decisions, which they perceive as failure. She seeks marriage with Mamadou Condé in a way that would "cure" the malaise of being a single mother, living out the Guadeloupean social norm in the local saying that titles the first chapter, "Mieux vaut mal mariée que fille" ("Better to be badly married than to be a spinster"; 13). Even as she tells of the financial and emotional hardships of raising her son on her first salary, she has no such anxiety at having a second child although her financial

situation had not changed—it is the acquisition of that wedding ring that mattered, and her hardship having a child before getting married can be understood as more emotional than financial. In a way, then, the passage mentioned above in Côte d'Ivoire creates the kind of scene where the "fards" 'makeup' come into play, where the drama of rebellion is superposed onto the imposition of shame, the latter engendered by a gap between what is expected and what one has done. As we read this passage, we see that Condé does not content herself with a simple lie. Like her stories, it develops limbs, has corollaries, continues into a whole new sentence after "ma vie trop bien réglée" ("my overly regulated life"). That is, she keeps adding details: "J'avais donc planté là mes études et étais partie pour l'Afrique" ("So I abandoned my studies and left for Africa").

We must recognize in this "confession" the sustained narrative that underlies many of Condé's earlier autobiographical texts, her interviews, and even her early fiction, such as *Heremakhonon*. Rebellion, indefinitely, describes and fills in for all the malaise that might attach to what she perceived, through her bourgeois social upbringing, as a lack of achievement, according the standards of her family, her class, but also of her Guadelopean people. Indeed, it is important to take note of the specificity of this malaise in its distinction from what is understood as the typical Antillean person—the poor folk—a people and culture that Condé insists she was not part of, did not see much of, and was sheltered from to the point of ignorance, ignorant even of the Creole language that surrounded her and that, according to Antillean linguistic nationalists, expresses the Antillean experience and world more than any other. This understanding of Condé's "fards" as "making up" the disconnect with her

circumstances illustrates, in innumerable ways, the postcolonial condition of living still under the colonial gaze.[22] Even while sheltered from the Antillean masses and living sequestered among the privileged bourgeoisie, Condé shares with the former (or epitomizes, in a way they did not share) the insufficiency engendered by her hybrid experiences of her island seen through the eyes of, and through comparison with, Europe—the experience, truly, of the black middle class, that class most troubled by its dual inability to leave behind its history and its desire to emulate the colonizer, living by the standards inherited from him.

More than mere emulation, however, the brazen masking that we see Condé enacting also elaborates the contours of rebellion, a valorization of the qualities that bring pride, individuality and self-determination, against the irrepressible history and imposed shame of a past of slavery. In *Coeur à rire*, Condé narrates how her parents, and by extension, her country's official stance toward the history of slavery was one of repression, silence, negation, all reflecting a misplaced shame. The freedom of spirit and rebellion that Condé here recounts acts upon and against the continued effects of a history of bondage, with the structures of deligitimation and the racialized social hierarchies that naturalized the shame that irrationally stemmed from it. Rebellion, on the other hand, is representative of stances towards cultural nationalism that are

[22] Frantz Fanon's seminal *Black Skin, White Masks* takes on and gives name to the alienation experienced by people in the French Antilles who had been educated to only respect French culture and civilization and to remain ignorant of the cultural value and contribution of their own local culture, language, as well as being deceived as to the place of racism in the reinforcement of this colonial "civilizing mission." Aimé Césaire's work as a Négritude writer also reclaims a culture that would not be European, a sense of pride in the specificity of one's essential self, defined and black, and more specifically, originating in Africa. Kamau Brathwaite, the important poet and historian from Barbados, also suggests that to be poetically true to the Caribbean, one must engage in a syntax, language, and rhythm that did not follow European literary norms, which he dubs "nation language" ("Contradictory Omens")

emphasized by anticolonial thinkers and activists; rebellion requires a need to perform against the norm, to invent the face of a new standard; in Condé's case, it bears noting that these revolutionary values, in a French cultural genealogy, are inextricably linked to the values of the bourgeoisie, a complex history which complicates the now unquestioned assumption that the working class would be the source of resistance and change, the site of authenticity.

The "masks" that Cottenet-Hage identified as "solidity" are indeed so. The performances that Condé enacted in her texts, roles that became important to, if not primarily constitutive of her authorly persona, were necessarily solid in the protective role they were to play in her complex life of errantry. As masks, they allowed her to overcome her insecurities because of the self-affirmation, doubled or fictional though it be, that it allowed for her. These masks called attention to the authorial persona that Condé had constructed for herself, as much as it took full advantage of the masquerade to make that persona constantly better because of the rebellious, and consequently, transformative quality of her masquerade. As the Aristotelian "idealized mimesis" suggests, this autobiographical construction of the author was bound for greater than the truth—more than appearing stable, solid, self-assured, normal, the Maryse Condé that the readers know would be a multiplication of all these things, relentlessly.

**Scriptural exhibition**

I opened this chapter with an epigraph citing Mary Russo on women's spectacular transgressions. And indeed, the performance in Maryse Condé's writing does not limit itself to a doubling between truth and "lie," between the self and the image one would

like to create of that self through external apparatus (mask, story, image). There is also a self-professed vocation towards an excess of impact, towards reaching beyond norms and expectations, inspiring acknowledgment of something precisely because of its exaggeration: "ces involontaires (?) tentatives de d'embellissement. … j'ai souvent rêvé de choquer… Plus d'une fois, j'ai regretté que des flèches contenues dans mes textes n'aient pas étaient perçues" ("these involuntary (?) attempts at embellishment…. I've often dreamed of shocking… More than once, I've been disappointed that the arrows in my texts had not been seen"; 8).

Condé writes: "le désir de choquer ne saurait, à lui seul, résumer la vocation d'un écrivain" ("the desire to shock could not, by itself, describe the writer's calling"; 9). Yet, the implication is that this desire to be seen, to shock, is at least partly related to her vocation of writer. Together with the anecdote about making her mother cry as the initiating moment of her career, it gives a clearer sense of Condé's attitude towards her work: writing is, after all, both the product of her desire to "shock," and it engenders it as well. Whatever we might conclude about the performative contradictions of her autobiographical oeuvre and her authorial persona, this exhibitive intention is inseparable from her work.

The shocking, meanwhile, is not meant to be private: Condé describes her writing as "troquer des drames de papier contre de vraies drames" ("trading paper dramas for real drama"; 9). Unlike the affirmation of culture, the construction of identity, or the recuperation of history that many Antillean writers claim as their purpose, Condé sees the work she produces as the production of "dramas." These dramas are constituted, in her formulation, both of the life she has led and observed,

and of her inventions, her fiction. Conde conceives of the life that provides inspiration for her writing ("real drama"), as well as the work of writing ("paper dramas"), as performance, consisting in dramatic conflict. She conceives of herself as creating (through characters) and as interpreting (through herself) a part.

The exhibitive tendency in Condé's oeuvre is part of a longer, gendered history of female transgression. We have already seen the familiar gendering of power in Leigh Gilmore's study of confession vis-à-vis Christian mystics. She describes the actions of female mystics:

> Mysticism (confessions) provided an interesting test for the possibility of a counterdiscourse, as it revealed the limits of the church/state's tolerance in authorizing women's speech as "truth." Although mysticism was busily assimilated to an orthodox agenda, it was a counterhegemonic form of worship and, most important, began to generate its own discourse. Significantly, it was practiced largely by women…. Mysticism was not practiced at the altar or in other "authorized" sites of worship. Mystics would display their power publicly, would rush about to take communion; in short, they made spectacles of themselves. Their visibility was part of the significance of mysticism and describes an incipient alternative form of authorization. Paradoxically, the power and authority of priests devolved from unseen sources. (119)

Making spectacles of themselves becomes the particular property of women, or it is observed more readily in those roles that women dominate. As in Carnival, which will

be discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, a different language is used to describe women exhibiting their bodies through skimpy costumes from that language used to describe men scaring people with traditional devil masks. Language reveals the way that certain kinds of visibility is perceived, and reflects the authority (or lack thereof) to claim that visibility. Most interesting in Gilmore's description here is the way that women's visibility is directly linked to "an incipient alternative form of authorization." Women who made spectacles of themselves, "rushing about," to display their power were aberrations from the standard "unseen" sources of (male) power and authority, but paradoxically, their actions also "began to generate its own discourse." As we think about Condé's continued insistence in possessing her own writing, its strategies, its subjects and its form—possessing to the point of transforming and contradicting it at will—it becomes important to ask: to what extent is such a right possible only if the female author is allowed to "make a spectacle of herself"? Just as her writing is always at the cusp of deauthorization by other Antillean writers, can the performative, dramatic, and unabashedly self-centered writing of Maryse Condé be perhaps the best and only possibility of speaking and being heard, not for an entire cultural or political community, but for the women, middle class, and exiled persons who are unrepresented in their own country's cultural mythologies?

**Creole demasking**

Despite the debate between the Créolistes and Condé about the use of Creole language, which Condé calls "le problème majeur aux Antilles" ("the biggest issue in the Antilles"), we know nonetheless that she is invested in using Creole on her own

terms. Despite the likely universalization to which her oeuvre might be surrendered, traversing locations and peoples even when the work is set in the Americas, Condé is firmly committed to being part of the Antillean dialogue on literature, to having her exilic focus accepted and indeed, to make an exilic experience as much part of that canon as the idealized, lower class, creole cultural practices. The ways that she uses Creole language, and, perhaps intentionally, misuses it, contributes to the particular focus—that of the simultaneously global and local—that she aspires to bring together in her work.

The second time *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is invoked as a chapter title in *La vie sans fards*, it is in French: "Deuxième vol au-dessus d'un deuxième nid de coucou" (40). In a way, the linguistic dialogue that Condé is attempting to set up is one not between French and Creole, but French and English—and Africa. In the first paragraph of this chapter, Condé places in-text a "foreign" word, but one, *kwashiorkor*, that unlike the Créolistes', is not Creole but derived from the Ga language of Ghana, and used in the West to designate a tropical disease of malnutrition. The strategy of making Creole foreign to French as a means of bringing it visibility is exposed here as a strategy of exoticization. Condé's comparable insertion of foreign language into her text reprises the Créoliste maneuver but from a place that is truly foreign to the either Creole or French-speaking reader. Her word, furthermore, fails at "local flavor" by making that flavor bitter—it does not appetize

the reader but interrupts any attempt at exoticization to indicate the difficult realities of that foreign context.[23]

If Condé is unwilling to perform such linguistic defamiliarization with Creole in this, her most intimate work, it might be that, for the always exiled Condé, there is a fundamental incoherence in the attempt to render Creole "exotic," even for this writer who does not claim it as her mother tongue. The "foreign" for Condé is a familiar experience, filled with regular attempts to live in very distant locations among truly foreign languages, as well as the continuous experience of being estranged from her own homeland, and her own condition of linguistic (un)belonging to it. Can she, as a Guadeloupean person, alienate herself from Creole to the point of being able to treat it as foreign, the way English or other African languages enter her texts as signs of strangeness within a French textual background? Performance frequently lies in that ability to live the foreign-local, the alienating duality of consciousness, which enacts an essentializing and foreignizing gaze upon the self so as to render it part of a global vocabulary of the strange. Yet with regards to Creole, Condé does not enact that self-exoticizing gaze that reduces the language to cliché, just as she is unable to represent colonial alienation as simply one thing, in her experiences either in or outside the Antilles. In *Coeur à rire*, she questions the charge of alienation brought to her parents, for in their conviction of who and what they were, they inverted the claim that they were "trying to be something they were not," the claim of "pretention" that is

[23] Condé's refusal of the exoticization of Africa also resists the tendency to sensationalize the difficulties of life in Africa, generally, or in Guinea (where this scene is set) specifically. Her tone is purely descriptive, and represents with a sharp eye her own first experience of this city which combines observations on its inhabitants' poverty and her admiration of its islamic rituals. She falls in love with the place, but is unromantic: "J'y ai compris le sens du mot "sous-développement." J'ai été témoin de l'arrogance des nantis, et du dénuement des faibles" (40).

contained in accounts of alienated, francophile Antilleans, and renders the experience of performing oneness with French, given their economic ease and their education, a doubled experience that was rather authentic to them.

Condé's use of Creole is not generalizable to a specific position or ideology. Yet, if we take the idea that I have been exploring throughout this dissertation, that Creole is performative in the literary text because of how it makes itself visible, how it acts against a certain norm, calling attention to its specificity, we can also read Creole in Condé precisely for how it marks the forbidden, the strange, the hidden—not as the desirable but rather laden with negative determinations, where, for example, it brings nothing more than denigration to its speaker. The use of Creole in Condé is both easily place-able (in some texts) within a certain complex of meanings, and also converts that set of "roles" into a mask, as the impenetrable.

*Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* is Condé's narration of her grandmother Victoire's life—the grandmother that she never knew, but whose difficult and unusual life fascinated her. Her epigraph from Bernard Pingaud prepares us for the book's genre: "Il devient indifférent que je me souvienne ou que j'invente, que j'emprunte ou que j'imagine." ("It has become irrelevant if I remember or if I invent, if I borrow or if I imagine"; 11). She reinforces this claim in the prelude to the work, where she explains that she has always had a fascination for Victoire and her life, in the servant class, so different from Condé's own, but had never had the time or information necessary to write her story. She thus concludes, just before beginning the first chapter, "Tel qu'il est, je livre le portrait que je suis parvenue à tracer, dont je ne garantis certainement pas l'impartialité, ni même l'exactitude" ("Such as it is, I offer

the portrait that I have managed to draw, and I make absolutely no guarantees as to its impartiality, or even of its accuracy"; 19). In short, anything goes. Except that, as we already know for Maryse Condé, some of that anything will always be driven by both her search for the truth, and her penchant for performance.

Victoire is presented in this text as a woman of few words. Smothered by the emotion that the self-conscious narrator, Maryse Condé herself, brings to this story, the protagonist Victoire has rather little to say. However, as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Victoire speaks Creole and Creole only, even as she lives and works as a servant in a predominantly upperclass world of white descendants of colonizers who speak only French amongst themselves. But ironically enough, Victoire is, herself, (almost) as white as white can be. A mulatto born illegitimately of a brief encounter between her black mother and a white sailor, Victoire is a mulatto who possesses none of the privileges that are stereotypically associated with her color. The poignancy of this visible "privilege," that masks a condition of deep dispossession and delegitimization across most segments of the society, becomes clear as she grows older in her situation of consistent destitution. When Victoire's darker complexioned daughter and Condé's mother, Jeanne Quidal, was just beginning to blossom in her work, to gain status, and to integrate the budding black bourgeois class, the educated and elegant young woman needed to bring her mother along on the staid society calls that members of this circle paid each other. Condé narrates:

> Je dois convenir qu'en effet Victoire constituait un problème. Assise sur le bord de sa chaise Hepplewhite, elle demeurait muette à travers toutes les conversations parce que incapable de manier le

français, cette arme clé sans laquelle les portes de la civilisation demeurent closes. À cette époque-là, pourtant, grâce aux leçons de Valérie-Anne, elle avait fini par mémoriser quelques phrases :

--Ça va bien, merci.

--Et de votre côté ?

--Si Dieu veut.

--S'il plaît à Dieu.

Malheureusement, elle n'était pas douée. Elle y mettait trop d'effort, prononçant ces mots avec une application des plus comiques. Parfois, elle s'emmêlait tout bonnement les pédales. Ainsi à la question : "Comment allez-vous, madame Quidal ?" elle répondait invariablement: "Si Dieu veut," malgré les remontrances exaspérées de Jeanne qui, avant chaque sortie, la chapitrait comme une enfant.

Bientôt, à l'initiative des Faustins ou du moins avec leur complicité, les Grands Nègres du Moule la surnommèrent: "Mme Sidieuveut." Les choses n'en restèrent pas là…. des ragots commencèrent à flamber… N'avait-elle pas été sa maîtresse? Pourtant, sa fille était bien noire, bien trop noire pour être son enfant. Qui était son père? … Pas surprenant ce *manjé-kochon-là*! Les mulâtresses ont toujours eu le feu au cul!... Ces railleries et ces médisances revinrent aux oreilles de Jeanne et Victoire. Nous ignorons ce qu'en pensa la mère, toujours impassible, murée dans le silence.

I must admit that Victoire was, in fact, a problem.

Sitting on the edge of her Hepplewhite chair, she remained mute throughout every conversation because she simply could not manage French, that key weapon without which society's doors remain firmly shut. Around that time, however, thanks to lessons from Valérie-Anne, she had managed to memorize a few sentences:

--I'm fine, thank you.

--And you?

--If the Lord wills it.

--If it please God.

Unfortunately, she wasn't very good. She tried too hard, pronouncing these words with an intensity that was nothing short of comic. Sometimes, she got confused. To the question, "How do you do, Madame Quidal?" she invariably responded, "If the Lord wills it," in spite of Jeanne's exasperated scolding when, before each outing, she lectured her like a child.

Soon, instigated by the Faustins, or at least with their collusion, the Great Negroes of Le Moule nicknamed her: "Madame Ifthelordwillsit." That wasn't all… Rumours started spreading… Wasn't she his mistress? But her daughter was quite black, too black to be his child. Who was her father?… Predictable, that *manje-kochon*! Mulatresses have always been sluts!... This ridicule and slander made its way back to Jeanne and Victoire's ears. We don't know what the mother thought, stoic as she always was, walled up in silence. (205-206)

At a later moment in the narrative, when Jeanne sees her mother in Place Victoire, sitting with the white Walbergs who she had worked for during many years, Jeanne pretends that she does not see her, worried about being embarrassed before her coterie of young black and educated friends:

> Aller l'embrasser? Cela veut dire la présenter à ses amis ainsi que le couple Walberg? Jeanne devinait les pensées qui se tairaient. Les commentaires qui ne se formuleraient que derrière son dos. Elle imaginait le dialogue :
>
> --Comment allez-vous, madame Quidal ?
>
> --Si Dieu veut.
>
> Elle n'en eut pas le courage et passa, fière, les yeux fixés sur les frondaisons des sabliers.
>
> Go and kiss her? Meaning, introduce her, as well as the Walberg couple, to her friends? Jeanne knew what they would think but not say. The comments that would only be made behind her back. She imagined the dialogue:
>
> --How do you do, Madame Quidal?
>
> --If the Lord wills it.
>
> She didn't have the courage and passed by, proud, eyes fixed on the foliage of the sablier trees. (216)

In these passages, which, with their focus on Creole language commerce, are not common in this text, Condé has created a means to engage the Creole-French dilemma in its social importance, the reality of using Creole in the stratified Antilles. In these

passages, language abilities (or the lack thereof) carry grave consequences, notably the inability for a mother and daughter to properly express their feelings for each other, until they become alternately visible and invisible, masked or hidden from each other. In her Creole incapacity, Victoire remains quietly on the bench, and Jeanne, in the palpable fear of her peers' scorn, is unable to approach her. The divide between the two is not about communication, as together they could easily speak the same language. Yet this less semantic divide is intraversible.

As presented by Condé, Victoire was a cook. She would never say much, her Creole (in)competence shaming her to a practiced silence, but she expressed herself through her extraordinary talents with food. When she speaks in this text, it is usually to quickly respond to a question, to say no, or to seek further self-effacement. The black bourgeois elite were able to fixate on Victoire's language as a means for attacking every other social trait that was unacceptable to their group—her light skin and status as a "mulatresse," her low class, her lack of education, her hazy status as an "adulterer." While Victoire is shown to be perfectly capable of communicating with her boss, Ms. Walberg, with Victoire speaking Creole as Walberg responding in French, Victoire is unable to produce the French necessary to act out a certain social standard. French, more than a means of communication here, is a performance of status, and like the performative and exhibitive Creole in the work of other Antillean writers, it is the French that is here paradoxically shown to function as an opaque symbol, carrying performative meaning irrelevant of signification—after all, the French that Victoire fails to master is little more than the phatic formulas of social niceties. Creole, on the other hand, is repressed in this commerce of identity, even if it

could easily have functioned as a means of communication between Victoire and her daughter's friends in black bourgeoisie. Unlike the triumphant creolized writings of many Caribbean writers where Creole brings a performative visibility, Condé summons the reader to a time and place where Creole was not only effaced, but it dragged along, in its erasure, the people who could speak nothing else. Yet, we note the malicious charge of *manjé kochon* ("he who eats with the swine"), the ugly Creole insult that comes out, even from this elite, especially as they warm up in their vociferous delegitimizing of the mulatresse they could not accept. Creole, then, rather than a language of community, becomes the language of exclusion.

The performance of national identity symbolically is not Condé's focus. Her self-representation, however, is everywhere else. Her authenticity as "creole," either through language or culture, is legitimately questionable, even to herself.[24] Creole language, in her work, usually appears as content, as theme, rather than as a performative act, with the exception of *Traversée de la Mangrove*. Creole is still a question, with its answers not yet so fully decided as the Créolistes would suggest, with its masks still being fit and retried. This intention to engage with the question is staged in the opening pages of *Victoire*, as Condé the narrator speaks of the way this book on her grandmother, written late in her career, had followed her through all the years before she wrote it:

> Parfois, je me réveillais la nuit et la voyais assise dans un coin de la chambre, semblable à un reproche, tellement différente de ce que je devenais.

[24] Speaking about her plays, Condé mentions that she lets the director adapt it to Creole because she does not have the facility with Creole to do it herself. *Maryse Condé et le théâtre antillais*

> --Qu'as-tu à faire à courir à Ségou, au Japon, en Afrique du Sud ? À quoi riment tous ces déplacements? Ne sais-tu pas que l'unique voyage qui compte est intérieur? Qu'attends-tu pour t'intéresser à moi? Cela seul compte! semblait-elle me dire.
>
> Sometimes, I woke up in the night and saw her sitting in a corner of the room, like a rebuke, so different from what I was becoming.
>
> "What are you doing running to Ségou, to Japan, to South Africa? What sense does all this displacement make? Don't you know that the only journey that matters is inside? Why are you waiting so long to start being interested in me? That's all that matters," she seemed to say. (17)

The summons from Condé's grandmother to a "voyage intérieur" 'journey within' echoes the Créolistes' demand that Antillean literature focus on the Antilles, "intérieur" in opposition to what they understand as the "externalizing" project of Negritude.[25] When Condé finally focuses explicitly on the Antilles, however, going as far "inside" as her own family, what interests her, more than constructing a national mythology based in archetypal characters, is the exploration of the women that drove that history (genealogy in this story is traced only through women), the complexity of racial identity and exclusion (the "privilege" of the mulatto is called into question) and the inner workings of alienation, when a daughter and mother cannot speak to each other for fear of losing one person's hard-earned status. The performance, fictionalization, and very self-conscious narration of this story is but one way to be

[25] See *Éloge de la Créolité*

truthful to the ongoing performance and invention of roles, through exile or through interiorization, that constitutes Maryse Condé's Antillean expression.

# CHAPTER 4

# REWRITING THE NATIONAL STORY:

# RESPECTABILITY AND THE "CARNIVAL MENTALITY"

Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago is the most prominent and visible cultural event in the nation, and the ideal occasion for thinking about non-literary performance in this Caribbean country. Independent since 1962 when the West Indies Federation collapsed, the dual-island nation-state has officially and unofficially elevated the annual pre-Lenten festival to exemplar of local culture, the product of a proud history of anti-colonial and anti-slavery resistance. The event, which has come to be identified both with Trinidad and with the Caribbean region more broadly, consists officially of two days of parading in costumes to local music, but has expanded into months of music, partying, and preparation, all of which is saturated with the practice of various performance arts. These include calypso, soca, and chutney music played over the radio, in large *fetes* (parties), and annual competitions; steel pan music largely played in competitive bands; popular dance through *wining* during fetes and the parades;[1] and *masquerade*, the parading of costumes simultaneously as individuals and as part of large Carnival bands. The elaborate, giant costumes of the "King" and "Queen" of each band, as well as the bands as a whole, are also judged in national competition, adding a competitive logic to the event. Carnival is thus in large part the confluence of numerous acts of performance, practiced on a popular level, and it brings together

[1] Wining is a popular gyrating dance that has become representative of Carnival, but also of Trinidadian and Caribbean culture more generally. It has become a local criteria of authenticity, such that those performing it are informally evaluated and recognized for their individual sensuality, skill, and legitimacy within the national context.

sound, action, and visual display. But with its colonial-era beginnings and its co-optation in the postcolonial era for capitalist goals within Creole national ideologies, these performances are also inevitably political.

While performance can be seen to be constitutive of Carnival, theorizations of its political value have been largely limited to theorizations based on the separate arts that constitute the festival. For example, Errol Hill's important *Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* theorizes its value within the criteria of traditional "theatre." And Gordon Rohlehr has frequently offered invaluable analyses of the importance of Calypso as a form of political intervention. In my juxtaposition of Carnival performance and Creole language structures, I would like to take the important focus on performance arts in the Caribbean towards an understanding of performance as a distinct, political mode, drawing from a very located political and social history. While I will be focusing in particular on the Trinidad Carnival in this chapter, I will be thinking Caribbean subjectivity more broadly in order to locate the ways that Carnival expression is doubly performative—in its artistic form but also in its political and cultural intention. I suggest that the translative gymnastics that are common to Caribbean language, especially in its play between Creoles and standardized languages, allows us to think more broadly about the negotiations of "internal" and "external" selves, "native" and "foreign" forms, but also to consider how this automatic and constant self-translation, is itself part of the native negotiation of a complex hybrid history. While we have, in preceding chapters, looked at how this multiplicity functions in linguistic, literary creoleness, here we are interested in the way that Carnival, even in its articulations as institutionalized national culture (as per

Errol Hill, for example), reveals, through its primary mode of expression—performance—an important layering of ways of being and of expressing self.

**Carnival: A Situated Theory**

Carnival theories, usually drawing on M. M. Bakhtin's seminal writings on the "carnivalesque" in *Rabelais and his World*, tend to be read as dehistoricized, generalizable models for understanding Carnival practices. Yet Bakhtin was analyzing medieval and renaissance Carnival practices in Western Europe, focusing on the literary carnivalesque specific to Rabelais' Early Modern writings, all while he was writing from early to mid-twentieth century Russia. The object of Bakhtin's findings could have been the modern era of the Europe of which and for which he was writing, as was suggested by Mary Russo (213), but it has also been extrapolated into a universal model for thinking subversive laughter, the inversion of class hierarchies, and the cyclical upheaval of social order through bacchanalian festivities.

Trinidad Carnival, on the other hand, cannot be understood, analyzed, or critiqued without taking the very particular circumstances of the region, its people, and their history into consideration. Unless the festival is thought within the historical and political circumstances that produced it, from the masquerade to the alcohol to the music, its analysis will be limited to an idealized (albeit frequently useful) model, one too far removed in place and time from the modern Caribbean. To Bakhtin's explication of "class" reversal and "institutional" upheaval that defined Carnival in Europe, Trinidad Carnival adds questions of racial hierarchies being challenged: in one example of classic Trinidad masquerade, "jab molassie" costumes, a devil

costume based in smearing the masquerader with molasses, is triply signifying. It carries cultural signs of an African diasporic heritage thematically; visual signs in its deepening of or emphasis on blackness that blatantly counters the social denigration of blackness; and socio-historic references to the sugarcane plantation industry that used enslaved Africans and indentured laborers to produce, among other products for consumption, the molasses that becomes the primary material of this costume. That industry continues to mark society and the economy in the Caribbean, but the use of the molasses here implies a deepening and emphasizing of its meaning, rather than a momentary shedding of social categories and their effects. Compounding the visual significance of this profoundly revelatory yet paradoxically still opaque masquerade, the *jab molassie*, linguistically, carries a French mark, the word "jab" derived from "diable." Thus appears references to the French Creole tradition that intruded in the British colonial context with its Carnival culture, and that complicates even further the costume's already differential readability, the impermanent but far from transparent "stuff" of the blackness it performs, and raises physically the specter of a threatening devil, giving life to the plantation owner's historical fear of slave rebellion, in the form of violent uprisings as well as the mystical (sorcerous) powers reputed to the Africans through fear of their religious practices.

To Bakhtin's theory, the Trinidad Carnival must also add questions of cultural heritages transforming over generations, of spiritual and philosophical systems for which masking and dance were part of ongoing practice and not a form of social upheaval, and of modes of bacchanal and performance that, while projecting absolute transformation, function only through order and organization. This orderly imperative

is apparent in resistance and combat practices that are part of Carnival today, like the ceremonial canboulay torch-carrying parades, the elegant and ritualistic stickfighting, the meticulously written protest calypsos, and the rigorously practiced music of steel bands. Today, that organization is still paramount, and it is now handled by both the government-sponsored reenactments of the practices mentioned above, as well as by the gargantuan capitalist masquerade bands that help move Carnival more and more into an all-inclusive itinerary of pleasure, fueled by extravagant spending. Contemporary Carnival, recuperated as *tradition* by the state, invested with values representative of the Caribbean culture and context, of the people who practice it, of Creole cultural exceptionalism, and of an increasingly consumerist culture, is no longer an interruption of the status quo, but the exemplary practice of what is seen as the everyday mode of being for this particularly extravagant Caribbean nation. Carnival *is* official national culture here, coherent with society as it has been defined within the rubrics of national identity, not disruptive of it as per a Bakhtinian bacchanal.

I submit that Carnival, channeled through nationalism, becomes a form of postcolonial expression that performs the nation in a transhistorical answer to colonial legacies,[2] all while it serves transnational desires for recognition in a neoliberal globalizing world. Carnival negotiates the split intentions generated by Trinidad's neo/colonial history and its postcolonial present, taking full advantage of the masks made possible by its historical record translatively reread into a nationalist present. The characteristic Carnival masking, like the bikinis of contemporary Carnival, is as

[2] Peter van Koninsbruggen's *Trinidad Carnival* provides an extensive ethnological theorization of the national and nationalist determinations of Carnival.

much about concealing the self behind a new being—which is the traditional purpose of transformation that a mask effects—as it is about revealing and erotically exhibiting the body that calls and attracts a coveting/desiring audience—quite like the differential opacity and, paradoxically, the translative visibility engendered in a multilingual text. The duality of this performance reflects the mode through which Carnival is performed today, the mode that both seeks to conceal a self so as reveal or don a different, more desired persona, and to exhibit this new persona to the end of attracting attention and seeking validation.

Rex Nettleford states:

> To be a King or a Queen for a day or two may well speak to a deep aspiration for recognition and status that elude the denigrated African in exile, the alienated worker, the jobless citizen with little sense of hope otherwise… In Trinidad Carnival, there are Kings and Queens aplenty, receiving recognition and status from an adoring populace as well as from officialdom. (196)

Nettleford succinctly describes the social condition and historical context in which this performance and desire for visibility is set. This masquerade, one form in which I will elaborate the mode of translative performance seen during Carnival, carries within it the condition of being modern while continuing to exhibit attributes that can be read as "uncivilized" or "uncouth"; of being free while carrying still the scars and reflexes of colonization and slavery; of being democratic while disobedient, knowing "democracy" to have been, in Europe as in the Americas, complicit in the colonial logics of control and hierarchy. The movement between the concealing mask and the

exhibitive masquerade is precisely where the translative duality of revelation and incomprehension (or opacity) intersect. In connecting this masquerade to the differential opacity of Creole and standard language in Carnival discourse, we will see how Carnival expression functions multilingually to challenge the standardized social discourse—the homogeneous and sanctioned version of the modern autonomous nation-state—without surrendering its legitimacy and place in the modern global order. Placed in the framework of multilingual practice, liberal models emerge as concurrent to, intersecting with, and in political coherence with the interrupting exhibition and revelation that is visually produced in Carnival masquerade performance. This is the very specific, very postcolonial, multilingual expression of social and political performance.

**What is an Independent Nation? A Necessarily Postcolonial One**

Trinidad obtained independence in 1962 from Great Britain, making it barely more than 50 years old as a self-governing country at the writing of this dissertation, and as a state recognized in the international community of nations. For political and cultural leaders charged with managing the country's transition to independence, one important task was engaging this newly autonomous people in the act of self-governance through the systems that were internationally recognized as modern and democratic and that these leaders were putting into place. Yet, this Parliamentary democracy adopted from England, was not an obvious or desired mode through which these formerly colonized people, having developed over centuries alternate ways to subversively exercise their will, would want to begin their experience of political

autonomy. In short, the liberal democratic systems inherited from former colonizers were hardly organic to the budding nations emerging out of colonization. Yet these structures were unavoidable, and Viranjini Munasinghe addresses this paradox in her discussion of Trinidadian nationalism:

> The historical task for nation builders in the postcolonial world is thus deeply contradictory. On the one hand, to qualify as legitimate players in the extant international order they have little option but to emulate the standards of progress set by Europe, which demand that they culturally re-equip the nation to meet the requirements of progress. On the other hand, such a re-vamping of culture undermines the very historical and cultural particularities of their identities that speak to their own forms of national genius. (667-668)

The nationalist imperative was one that was inseparable from the very same global hierarchies that had structured colonial governance, and the impossibility of escaping those hierarchies and their attendant civilizational standards, even in independence, are poignant in Munasinghe's interrogation: "What are the possibilities of autonomy for new postcolonial states even as they (out of political and material necessity) emulate and resist the West in their quest to achieve successful nationhood?" (666) The translative movement between emulation and disobedience, I posit, is the mode through which the postcolonial Caribbean arrives at self-determination, self-creation, and self-actualization.

Partha Chatterjee argues that postcolonial nations produce a "different discourse" as the "problematic [of nationalism] forces it relentlessly to demarcate

itself from the discourse of colonialism" (42). Following Chatterjee, I propose that self-determination in the postcolonial Caribbean necessarily diverges from Europe's inherited models of modern sovereignty and its attendant nationalism. Although the Caribbean has no pure and foundational "spiritual" ancestry upon which to base its "different discourse" (as per Chatterjee's India), autonomy in Trinidad necessarily incorporates the forms of self-determination that were developed by displaced migrants and their descendants who had been subject to colonization, slavery, and indentured servitude. These forms, given the colonial context in which they developed, carry within them that historical condition of domination as well as its contradiction: the reaction of disobedience, vulgarity, and individualism. Without its own ancestral form of autonomy, but still the need to demarcate itself, it is in the translative performance that local political practice manages to develop its own preferred form of self-expression.

**Autonomy and America**

One of the engines of layered purposes and values in Trinidadian expression has been external influence, both in the many changes of political status, administration, and populations during the colonial era, but also the neocolonial presence of North America and North Americans, literally and figuratively, both pre- and post-independence. Novelist Merle Hodge writes:

> The colonial era came to an end and we moved into independence. Theoretically, we could now begin to build up a sense of our cultural identity. But we immediately found ourselves in a new and more

> vicious era of cultural penetration. Television, which is basically American television, came to Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, the year the British flag was pulled down." (205)

Unavoidable and dominating outside cultures were intrinsic to Trinidadian national identity construction in the early twentieth century. The advance of American "civilization" just as British colonization retreated indicates a postcolonial context in which international cultural influences coincided with the newly concretizing national identity. American influence in Trinidadian culture was already underway before Independence because of the American occupation during the Second World War. The emulation of Americans and the US nation itself coincided with an increase in immigration from Trinidad towards North America, which held an allure of wealth, leisure, and power.[3] These expatriate Trinidadians in turn exerted influence from abroad through their still resident relatives, through the money they sent home or spent there, and through their practice of Trinidadian culture (including Carnival) into their adopted metropolitan homes, which led to shifts and transformations before it returned home to influence the original. The Independence period, then, of great importance in Trinidad's cultural consolidation, must not be seen preserved from the great American specter which would continue to magnetically draw Trinidadians, while also providing a fascinating example of the recognition that can come with democratic, independent, New World statehood in the wake of British colonization. It was an example that was in the same geographical neighborhood, but with enviable financial and political

[3] Earl Lovelace poignantly portrays the force of this American cultural influence in his short story "Joebell and America" in which a Trinidadian distinguishes himself (and is celebrated by the author) for his drive to leave the country and achieve more than his working class lot, a compulsion that he associates quite explicitly with the USA (*A Brief Conversion and other stories*)

success, and an insistent conviction in and affirmation of its own exceptionalism. Local writers, from V.S. Naipaul[4] through Lovelace repeatedly portray, during this period, Trinidadians' admiration for and emulation of the perceived American attitudes and demeanor of privilege and existential ease, an admiration especially common among poor and disempowered men and women.[5]

Harvey Neptune convincingly shows how the development of Trinidadian national identity in *Caliban and the Yankees* was early influenced by American soldiers stationed in Trinidad during World War II. In part of Neptune's reading, the local musical form of Calypso delighted, was encouraged by, and was ultimately promoted internationally by the American soldiers, while the Beacon group—a collective of local white and colored nationalist intellectuals who had taken upon themselves the role of promoting forms of folk culture such as Calypso—had more doubts about the value of this local art than the Yankee audience. Although advocates of a national culture, the Beacon group members were still "plagued by anxieties about race and the capacity for genuine artistry" in the largely black and brown Trinidadian population (131). In an astute observation on the gap between ideals and practices, Neptune writes: "For many within the colony's patriotic cadre, activists who tended to imagine themselves as beacons in the remaking of an enlightened national order, the Yankee years presented a disturbing Trinidadian scene. It was one in which the tempo of "the people" appeared to be ahead, that is, more modern than that of the

[4] In Naipaul's early novel *Miguel Street*, the occupying Americans figure regularly among the cast of local characters, who, from the first anecdote and then repeatedly, openly admire and emulate American behavior. Naipaul also references the imitation of Americans in *Middle Passage.*

[5] Naipaul and Lovelace only present men in these roles desiring Americanness, but this is also symptomatic of their oeuvres, heavily favoring masculine subjects.

leadership" (11). These activists' packaging of local culture as static and monolingually "folk" ultimately obscured the ways in which the translative tensions of fluid cultural activity, and new idioms of sovereignty that did not so easily fit the liberal democratic model, drove aesthetic developments in Trinidadian social practice. In the moment of American occupation, performing the narratives of resistance favored by the elite nationalists did not contribute as much, financially or culturally, to the development and growth of "national" cultural practice, or to its transnational visibility and legitimacy. In the end, it was this financial growth and this international visibility that underwrote Trinidadians' cultural innovations, and it was the American soldiers' patronage that motivated it. Even if external, the drive to create and perform culturally for this audience was as determined by a feeling of national pride in local specificity as the goals of the elite bearers of culture. The primary difference was the inherent translativity of the work that was being created, its incorporation of values that were simultaneously local and external, its ability to be more than holistically folk, and thus, in its eschewal of purity, its inherent modernity.

This observation is crucial because Calypso, along with other Carnival arts, would go on to be treated by the intellectual elite (and the bearers of the key to national tradition) as a precious cultural form that should not be compromised by financial considerations. Contemporary pundits of the "true" Carnival claim that the form it took in previous decades with traditional costumes, or the sharp-tongued calypsos of those very men performing during the American occupation years, were more true to a culturally and politically high purpose that they identified with Trinidad. This representation of a "purer" Trinidadian culture valued the challenging

and questioning of authority, and the use of creativity as resistance in the face of colonial power. Those nostalgic for these times of clearer moral and political purpose then decry the consumerism of contemporary Carnival, the surrender to the exhibition of skin that the mass-produced bikini costumes create. Yet, well before post-modern forms, before the admittedly capitalist transformation of the festival read as the loss of the nation's sacred tradition of resistance, before the nation had even decided what its representative traditions would be, Carnival arts, in the form of Calypso but also in forms as iconic as Sailor mas',[6] was already being transformed according to outside influence and, furthermore, transformed to please the consumer, in this case the American soldier, just as it tended to innovate in ways that betrayed a desire for transnational validation (such as the exportation of Calypsos by these very same occupying Americans).

Belinda Edmondson's study *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* shows how the American influence continues to obtain for Trinidadians after independence, emphasizing its importance in Carnival as well as pointing to its influence through beauty pageants, another important part of Caribbean social life. Together with achievements in sports internationally, these three types of performance, relying on spectatorship, on the exhibition of achievement, and functioning as sources of visibility, contribute similarly to claims of a local exceptionalism, a claim made both on the international stage and to the local population, to the emerging West Indian self.

[6] Sailor mas' describes the range of costumes that mimic a sailor's uniform, based on various stints of US and other nations' navies being stationed at Trinidadian ports, from the late nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth centuries.

Carnival, an event of self-exhibition, incorporating both pageantry and competition, thus becomes an ideal cultural practice within which Trinidadians can act out their glittering specificity all while appearing upon the world stage and exhibiting their exceptionality. Edmondson's work, by showing how this exhibition, so heavily influenced by the US, is coherent with the particular set of values that defines the local middle class, helps us see how exhibition functions as not only an argument for the successful reproduction of the values of the outside world, but also as an argument for the feeling of national achievement within local social status structures.

The independence project, which required the curation, consolidation, and invention of local culture for the sake of "founding" a unified nation,[7] concurrent with the increasing domination of American culture and values, was a project that incorporated in its already post-colonial alienation another kind of performance—not only to the former master's cultural and political standards, but also to the new "occupier's" values. In the meantime, a specific history, a legacy of dispossession and racialized hierarchies and conflict, a culture of music, language, and yes, resistance too, lay somewhere under, behind, and *also* in primacy over all this performance. The exhibition is, in this postcolonial context, both the continuation of a well-worn habit of playing to the external gaze and a new and changing practice of self-aggrandizement, the complex expression of the "look meh" coupled with the "pruhform." But it is also the coupling of this "playing to" the other's standards with the translative negotiating against the other's imposed system that retrieves and retools a specificity and that

[7] See Leah Rosenberg's *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*

retains, in the conjunction of its capitulation and its self-assertion, a locally and historically apt form of creative autonomy.

Peter Wilson's study of Caribbean social dynamics, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of the English-speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean* describes two conflicting but coexisting models of social interaction in the Caribbean, *reputation* and *respectability*. Respectability, according to Wilson, functions as a form of social stratification valued by the middle and upper classes, with its criteria coming from and turned towards the "external colonizing society" (9). In dialectic opposition to it, reputation is described as indigenous to the Caribbean, as not "premised in inequality," and it "recognizes personal attainment and differentiation and sanctions personal competition." Emerging in answer to the rigid hierarchies inherited (and adopted) from the colonizer, reputation "prizes in particular those talents and skills which bolster a self-image by putting down, undermining, and ridiculing respectability" (222-3). The "reputation" that Wilson describes resembles the bravado and easy machismo admired in Americans, yet the behavior and practices that he observes and theorizes take place in the Caribbean. In fact, the individualistic spirit described in the "competition" and bolstered "self-image" of reputation fits solidly within certain characterizations of Trinidadian behavior, such as those described by Edmondson, and many of which we will analyze later in the chapter. In Wilson's classic model of Caribbean expression, we have a glimpse of how North American influence comes together with an organically generated response to colonial hierarchies to produce a particularly Caribbean mode of postcolonial expression. Of note as well, is how the dual model represents already a performative enactment of

one "indigenous" category of behavior (reputation) in conjunction with others that have been imposed from outside, at least one of which involves an explicit emulation of the colonial metropole (respectability).

I am interested in this theory that posits a coexisting duality in Caribbean self-determination because, even while it categorizes behavior as either native or colonial, it ultimately conceives the two types of behavior to be in negotiation, neither version more internal or external to the locale than the other: the less "colonial" reputation was itself a product of the colonial context. The importance of "status" and "self-image" in both models reveals that both paths to self-actualization already work under a logic of performance. Whether following the colonial legacy in the "respectable" model, or the "reputation" model that, in Trinidad at least, is seen as an ethic deriving from Americanness,[8] the incorporation of external influences was a central and necessary part of constructing local identities and local modes of practicing autonomy—or, under the logics of performance, translatively engaging both in what is ultimately one intertwined mode of being independent while still inescapably post colonial.

**Carnival Creole Nationalism and its Exclusions**

In the inherent translativeness of the postcolonial condition, the European values inherited in the region coexist with a more local and historically relevant set of

[8] This can be read clearly in both Lovelace's and Naipaul's works. In Lovelace's "Joebell and America," the protagonist Joebell sees himself as American before he has even emigrated precisely because of his daring, ambition, and especially his lack of respect for traditional rules of "respectability." In Naipaul's *Miguel Street*, Americcanness is exemplified in characters such as Bogart and Eddie, men with clear and secret ambitions to gain status, but who achieve it only through illegal means or by earning money. Bogart's nickname comes from American cinema, while Eddie starts wanting status as he begins to frequent American soldiers.

practices. The colonial contribution to nation-making strategies manifests itself in this nationalist consolidation which strives towards homogeneity, a criterion developed out of European historical processes of national consolidation. The need for a unified and standardized national self is paradoxically coherent with the creole ideology that has become so common in Caribbean nationalist movements, and is central to Trinidadian nationalism. Creole identity, born of the contamination of New World settlement, the cultural and social transformation necessitated in the adaptation to place, and the constitutive miscegenation that the colonial plantation system made widespread, ultimately emerged as an ideal in that it elevated this constitutive contamination, transformation, and miscegenation to national characteristics, while excising diasporic ties to an ancestral land, cultural practices born of ethnic inheritances, and traditional religious and social values, while accepting European ones. In short, creoleness became the new national imperative, it became the means through which the previously denigrated "impurities" produced by colonization and slavery could be reclaimed as national culture, and it became, most importantly, the way of being modern to the international community, even if modern meant homogeneous.

As with most national constructs, this reduction of national identity to a singular understanding of creoleness excluded significant sectors of the population. Trinidad Carnival has been a site where this exclusion is staged, its role as exemplary and representative cultural practice corresponding with the creole culture it boasted. One of the largest groups that has historically experienced this exclusion is the East Indian population of Trinidad, and this particular subgroup and its changing relationship to the festival will inform our analysis at various points of this study. Yet

the ideological exclusions of Carnival creoleness are not reducible to race and ethnicity; another large group that does not participate is the growing population of evangelical Christians in Trinidad who foreswear all participation in Carnival for its presumed vulgarity and an excess of apparently sinful behavior. This difference marks another area of ethno-cultural tension in the presumably unified model of national culture, one in which the Catholic/Anglican community can more easily see itself.[9]

One less visible exclusion made subtly apparent during Carnival season is that of Trinidad's sister-island Tobago. Discourse during Carnival casually represents the twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago as but one island, using only "Trinidad" to describe the country, and "Trinis" to describe its citizens. This omission of Tobago in popular parlance is also present in political attitudes and language just as it is symptomatically reproduced in creative work associated with Carnival, and in the ideological work that brings the nation and the festival together. Having a distinct history up until the late 19th century, and continuing to have a distinct although connected economy and culture, Tobago does not share Trinidad's long relationship to or its contemporary passion for the Carnival festival. Carnival was largely adapted from the French Creoles who migrated to Trinidad during and after the cedula of population in 1783, so it was of little cultural and historical value to native Tobagonians. Almost in reinforcement of this separation, Tobago has served as a

[9] The Catholic and Anglican churches do not officially condone Carnival participation by its congregation, and some within that community maintain that Carnival is a vulgar and sinful event. However, many of the same would claim that at some point Carnival was a valuable cultural celebration, and many are happy to participate in it from afar, through television broadcasts, or in describing its older manifestations as true Trinidadian culture. In 2011, a band called Genesis was formed, which was meant to reconcile this impulse to participate and the desire to follow the stricter limits of the Catholic religion. The group had modest costumes and biblical themes. Their very existence illustrates the flexibility with which these churches view the festival, unlike the stricter evangelicals who see in it nothing short of the very manifestation of sin.

popular beach or retreat destination during Carnival weekend for Trinidadians seeking to escape the revelries, those very inhabitants who, for various reasons, do not see themselves and their values reflected in the festival. It thus bears insisting that as the threads between national identity and Carnival expression are drawn, they are already frayed by a fundamental omission, that of the smaller island whose importance in Trinidad, where the capital and seat of government is located, continues to be undermined and to generate claims of a failure of representation, political as well as cultural.

Finally, the limitations of the Carnival-as-nation formula is also visible in the incoherence between its gendered symbolism and its contemporary practice. Patricia Franco has identified how, while middle class women have become the primary practitioners of contemporary "pretty mas'"—the dominant form of Carnival that is also frequently represented as consumerist, ahistorical, and lacking in authenticity—the dominant assumption is that "traditional" Carnival is of greater value. Yet, as Franco adeptly observes, this traditional masquerade was primarily male and working class in form and participation. Thus, women are made incoherent with the state's narrative of national tradition, all while their scantily clad bodies and "pretty" participation become valuable images for the tourist promotion of the festival, the contrasting and, in this case, mistrusted modernity that Edmondson describes.

This symbolic exclusion of women from the national myth becomes complicated further with regards to East Indian women, whose very status as "traditional," according to their ethnically marked cultural practices, is read as incoherent with the larger society, in this case understood as "modern" through the

creole ideology. The East Indian population in Trinidad, now the largest ethnic group, was long seen as a threat to the Creole ideology, a "problem" expressed repeatedly by first Prime Minister Eric Williams, who went so far as to antagonistically dub them a "hostile and recalcitrant minority." East Indian cultural practices, taken broadly, were seen as too attached to a diasporic heritage from India, holding onto religion, music, food, and customs that presumably challenged the idea that people of the Caribbean had lost ancestral legacies, adapted to the homeland, and created entirely new (creole) cultural practices through contact with each other.

Carnival was, for much of its history, a complicated site for consolidation of national identity, precisely because resistance to or non-participation in it was as widespread among the population as its championing by cultural leaders. To a large extent, a conflict between the liberal-democratic nation state and the "bacchanalist" culture exemplified in Carnival is more representative of the multi-faceted body politic of Trinidad and Tobago than the myth that Carnival could symbolically contain the histories and culture(s) that converge in that place. In this constitutive contradiction around the festival, it is possible to see its long history and its continued relevance today in how the traditional exclusions become troubled even as the more valuable duality, the persistent multilingualism and performativity of Carnival practice, can continue.

This chapter draws on the conviction that the development and consecration of Carnival as national institution is not separable from the history of political community formation in Trinidad. Rex Nettleford takes note of a popular, cynical perspective on this imbrication of officialdom and the festival, the view "that

governments, in an effort to control the initiative of the masses, feel it more expedient to join than to alienate them" (189). This is perhaps true of contemporary politics, where party distinctions turn on ethnically charged cultural affinities that establish their respective voter-bases; it was also true in the independence era, when consolidating national identity into one unified category relied on the state's affirmation of the people's popular practices as cultural tradition. But it was also true in the pre-independence days; Carnival's instrumentalization by political figures in order to reinforce government control, its underwriting by the powerful, even while it maintained its attitude of disobedience, was no new initiative by the government, but is exemplary of the budding performance logics in which this colonial event functioned from as long as it has been documented. Carnival's emergence, transformations, and institutionalization was frequently the site of cultural or political identity negotiations by the island's inhabitants. This was true when it was a grounds of resistance expression in the pre-independence period; when it served as material for nationalist cultural affirmation during the decolonization era; as an example of postcolonial self-determination and the negotiation of future forms of political action; and in the wake of neo-liberal economic shifts, as the source for legitimation in a global competition for visibility.

The roles to which this festival has been put in the context of nation-formation and governmentality have rapidly changed in the space of a single century, and its range of participants have just as quickly shifted positions, convictions, ideology, and activity, suggesting anything but a holistic, unidirectional, and static purpose in both representation and practice of the festival. Meanwhile, the different political and

cultural values that it has been used to represent have not been clearly marked or absolutely separated, and some of them would have complex, intertwined, or even contradictory roles in national identity formation. The relationship between Carnival and politics in contemporary Trinidad is very much a translative negotiation between categories of cultural specificity and the state's political and economic interests. Most important to note, however, is that "political" intervention is not subsequent to activity by "the masses": Carnival, from the start, was as much produced by one as by the other, and was performatively engaged in both arenas.

**Carnival in the formation of the Nation.**

In claiming Carnival's implication in a particular representation of the nation, and by extension, the formative moments of political self-determination, I am also suggesting that the complexity of these particular political ideals can be located not only in the foundational moments of nation formation, but also at key moments of cultural and political identity formation well before the independence era.

Carnival's connection to Canboulay, and especially the now well-commemorated Canboulay riots, where the procession was banned and the ban resisted, has been easily merged together with the trademark state-promoted version of today's festival. However by looking at the debates that surrounded the riots, we get a more complex picture of the kinds of issues, social, political, and racial, that were under scrutiny and negotiation at that time. In particular, we see that this resistance narrative was never the sole property of the poor black constituency being elevated when the *Caribbean Quarterly* published an issue canonizing the festival as national

culture in June 1956. Even in this most "resistant" moment, which is staged in the yearly Canboulay riot reenactment today, economic and social loyalties were complex, and some of the privileged classes might certainly have been on the pro-Canboulay side of the debate.

Errol Hill asserts that Carnival's "ritual beginning" lies in the Canboulay procession through which the formerly enslaved celebrated emancipation on August first each year (23). This *cannes brulées* practice reenacted how slaves were made to march, torches in hand, to harvest the canefields that had been set on fire for the purpose ("cannes brulées" means "canes burnt"). In addition to carrying torches, participants in the Canboulay procession practiced stickfighting or *calinda*, although the details of who participated and what they wore is often unclear. What becomes a major event and referent in Carnival history is the Canboulay riots of the 1880's, in which stickfighters and other members of the proverbial "Old Yard," the starting point for working class Carnival revellers, revolted against the British authority's attempt to forcefully ban Canboulay. The violence of the colonial police and the responding defiance of the repressed masses became symbolic not only of the slave descendants' history, but of Trinidadian history as a whole, which triumphantly retells this rebellion as the sign of freedom affirmed, a freedom that had already been reclaimed, time and again, during many previous attempts to repress Carnival practices in the nineteenth century. Today's Carnival resistance narrative is thus the ongoing reenactment of an imperative to free expression, renewed year after year.

The colonial newspapers, probably the most-referenced primary sources on the riots, dedicated significant space to Canboulay in the wake of the riots. However the

writers who contributed to them, certainly not part of a downtrodden class of "lower elements," do not appear in the final story that is now retold year after year. In the nationalist reenactments of Canboulay today, the terms "emancipation" and "liberation" evoke images of rebellion which are simplified as poor blacks pitted against white authorities, a narrative with little room for French Creoles, for Caribbean immigrants who were not originally Trinidadian, for recent Africans who significantly rejuvenated the local stickfighting practice, and the growing population of East Indian indentured laborers brought in to replace former slaves on the sugar plantations. One furious letter to the Editor of the *Trinidad Chronicle* after the 1881 riots[10] invokes the unknown writer's rights as "a British subject and a tax-payer" as he asks with rhetorical flourish:

> Can we the people of this country call ourselves free: can we call ourselves protected: can we say that our rights, privileges and dearest liberties are respected: are we too an integer of that universal whole that makes up the great and free British empire? No, the circumstances and results, more especially of recent experiences, show us we are unregarded as [such?] in the eyes of certain of the powers that be...." (ACTUS)

The keywords here are those of freedom and self-determination, political representation, civil rights, foundational concepts for a discourse of sovereignty, an interrogation all the more damaging when Britain claims to maintain and propagate

[10] Worth noting about newspaper format at that time is that many of the "articles" found in it are actually correspondence sent in to the Editor, who presumably then decides whether to publish it or not, and includes his own comments. The actually reporting coming from the newspaper itself is, at least in this periodical, very limited. Many of the letters sent in are anonymous or signed with a pseudonym

such universal ideals. Although his race cannot be determined, the conclusion can be drawn that this man is not only highly literate, but well educated as to the ideals of political self-determination. And he invests significant passion in defending the creole masses.

This writer goes on to advance the cause of culture and tradition: "The Carnival, a national fête ingrained into the natures of our people, regarded as one of their dearest enjoyments, for which they will spend their last halfpenny, that fête sanctioned by law, held sacred by long custom and transmission to them by their forefathers." In the newspaper's own account of the Governor's concessionary address to the people, the triumphant conclusion to the riots, custom is again invoked as valuable and worthy of respect: "His Excellency addressed the crowd to the effect that had he known it was an old established custom of the people to play canboulay with torches, he would not have prohibited them from being used" ("Carnival Disturbances"). Another supporter of the Canboulay, whose piece was blatantly and provocatively titled "Pro-Canboulay," relies on longevity as a worthy argument against the repression of Canboulay, "As to the pretext that the *Cannes boulées* [sic] is a source of danger... the alarm may be dismissed as having been falsified by an experience upwards of half-a-century" (Anti-Casuist).

Tradition is the key word here, a term that exonerates rioters of any charges that they might be disrupting the order, and rather recognizing their most sacred right to follow their longtime culture. Tradition, incidently, will also be the term used, more than a century later, to connect Carnival as "custom" to the narrative of nation and citizenship during the Independence era. Particularly interesting is how this

essentialization of the Carnival festival as a fixed and holistic event, a cultural practice ingrained in history, coincides with the same impulse to fix and concretize the festival for the purposes of nationalist identity construction at the advent of sovereignty and self-representation in the twentieth century; so do the familiar claims to autonomy in the name of cultural "rights." The political logics that comes out of the ideals of the colonial context, a century earlier, sounds very much like logics that seeks to petrify the Carnival into a cultural artefact today. It bears emphasizing that these ideals are, as per this evidence, colonial. They take on, to a large extent, the language of respectability as they claim social recognition for the revelers. Regardless of their claims to rights, freedom, and liberty, these are the very terms through which subjects understood themselves *within* the British Empire. In the postcolonial moment, when self-determination is added to this discourse, what practices would change? How will this "tradition"-based subjectivity be reconstrued for a "democratic" context?

Letters defending the Canboulay were written in polished and educated prose, the race of the writers unspecified but certainly suggesting the support of... whites? Colored elites? In fact, the race and class loyalties of these outspoken writers are unclear. Although a British colony, many of the landholding inhabitants of Trinidad were actually of French origin, encouraged by the Spanish to settle from neighboring French islands before the British seized control of Trinidad in 1796.[11] These French creoles also practiced carnival; the cross-fertilization with African forms took place both before and after emancipation, such that both black and white French Creole inhabitants, the formerly enslaved as well as the plantation owners, had a cultural

[11] The Cedula of Population by the Spanish Crown in 1736 created incentive for French colonists to settle in Trinidad.

investment in Carnival. Although practiced differently according to class and race, Carnival was one aspect of what was proudly considered "creole," a term, in this particular case, that served to mark everything that was proper to these two groups—translatively unified against the British powers that shared neither language, crown, nor culture with them. The British presence in this island consisted primarily of administrators, whether in government, church, or schools, and estate managers working for absentee plantation owners. There was a constant tension between those that could lay cultural claim to the colony, and those who claimed the right to govern it. In the letters cited above, which defended the Canboulay practitioners, the focus was one of rights, self-representation and subjectivity, and others contained a subtle but evident quarrel with the continued condition of specifically British colonial rule, an authority that was probably not welcome by many of those with financial power.[12] It is also not insignificant that, as Brathwaite notes in his history of Jamaican society, the proximity and importance of an independent USA circulated influential ideas of sovereignty through the British Atlantic world.[13] The political values evoked in this writer's complaint met both British and French ideals without any clear philosophical contradictions. However, invoking this standard set of values was a performance of the shared global political standards that subtly hid the contextually relevant and locally understood differences that generated dissent.

[12] Another letter, written in French, claimed to explain Canboulay to a British visitor for whom the writer showed unabashed disdain.

[13] E.K. Brathwaite suggests that the American Revolution impacted colonial Jamaican society but did not push them far enough into revolution. He interpreted this failure to rebel as relevant to the way creole society then developed in an incomplete process of creolization. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica: 1770-1820.*

One is hard pressed to understand if the wealthy (white or "colored") colonists, powerful white colonial administrators, or poorer white keepers of order (policemen) were the real enemies of the poor black revelers who were caught in the battle that Canboulay. Their procession had been banned by the Governor, claiming it was a dangerous use of fire, but Police Captain Baker is given most negative attention for having authorized and encouraged his policemen to beat the Canboulay revelers who disobeyed the ban, and went out poised for a fight. These latter fought Captain Baker and his police force, but might they have, in fact, been unwittingly providing ammunition to the propertied landowners who saw the Crown as an inconvenient authority and sought opportunities to question its authority. Were the rebels perhaps thinking in the same political terms as the French Creole discontents, or does their alliance only go so far as their individual or group freedom to self-expression? One could infer that the Canboulay rioters, the black "folk" of Trinidad, did not pose a significant threat to the social structure and privileges enjoyed by the perhaps white, perhaps coloured elite that defended its practices in the papers, while their rebellious activity provided the perfect occasion for unveiling an anti-colonial discourse that, most likely, better represented the interests of the privileged, "tax-paying citizens." These colonists certainly did not harbor any undue softness towards the "lower orders" whose racial differences were never forgotten and are visible even in these vociferous defenses published in support of Canboulay. While the intentions of those defending the "rioters" in this debate may not be discernible, they must be considered for what is seen—well-educated and eloquent "citizens" at the ends of a transatlantic empire, whose complex loyalties to a white or "civilized" culture or race were not necessarily

commensurable with the British representatives of colonial power, but were instead translatively performing the subjectivity of the repressed classes from the position of the already privileged. The cultural benefits of a political struggle were at stake.

The writings protesting the Canboulay riots reveal the desire for a certain form of self-determination proved to be unavailable from this government, manifest in the actions of the police. Yet, the complaints focused on culture, which emerged as the preferred basis for arguing the cause of the rioters. Here, Carnival is reduced easily to its cultural content, while political intervention readable in the ritualistic form of the Canboulay processions is addressed only obliquely, understood merely as a category of "tradition."[14] This early in the history of Carnival, we can see the instrumentalization of "cultural values" for specific political needs, the imbrication of a practice often superficially read as "resistance," with the interests of those that already carry power. Cultural practice and the resistance it expressed were not necessarily or neatly aligned with a desire for the complete dismantling of systems of power, but incorporated complex loyalties to selected agents of social control. The writers who defend Canboulay here translatively move between conflicting codes being used to represent the people in question, and translatively perform apparently opposing subjectivities themselves. Either way, from the very beginning, the political and historical value of these uprisings were not lost on those who controlled the public sphere, and the process of consolidation and commemoration began almost

[14] Hill does tell us that this protest was about freedom, but he does this by returning to the idea of resistance.

simultaneously with the event.[15] Resistance was, then, almost already compatible with the control of institutional power.

**"The people must participate"[16]**

The logics of performance and the translative, the shift between reputation and respectability, are fundamental, many decades later, for understanding the political discourses that accompanied Trinidadian Independence. Here, in analysis of the speeches and writings of Trinidad's first Prime Minister Eric Williams, it will become clear that liberal democracy had become the standard of postcolonial governance and was the ideal towards which he worked. Due to Williams' perception that a translation of behaviors and expectations would be needed before the people could achieve this goal, what he asked of them was a performance, the playing of a part distinct from the self. For this leader, an important gap existed between the people he was leading and the model he wanted them to follow. Ultimately, the distance between that standard and the existing local practices and local desires is where the translative comes in, a translative which is performative in never enacting a complete change into the desired part, but putting it on and taking it off. Not only does the liberal standard need to be acted out, but the difference between the people and the ideal they must enact is not erased. Instead, their indelible difference is superposed exhibitively upon the performance.

---

[15] A feature that reprised various articles both in support of and in criticism of Canboulay were published in *The Trinidad Chronicle* very soon after the riots, on 16 Mar. 1881, entitled "Extracts from the Newspapers Relative to the Masquerade, from 1877 to 1880."
[16] From Eric Williams' "The Chaguaramas Declaration," in Selwyn Cudjoe's *Eric Williams Speaks*.

In the mode of democratic political participation projected onto the people, the body politic is conceptualized as unified and singular. This projection paradoxically makes visible the disconnect between the people's own practices and the imposed models of self-determination. As will become clear, Carnival has figured directly and indirectly in both political and cultural leaders' understanding of the possibilities and also potential vulnerability of the new nation. Indeed, Carnival became the symbolic limit point of democratic practice, even as it was the site for enacting a contrasting but active example of national creative expression.

As the intellectual and political leader who helped engineer the nation's independence, Eric Williams offers us a clear picture of the difficulty of instituting self-governance. By reading his skeptical remarks about the Trinidadian public and its potential for civic engagement, we are confronted with an attitude that has been largely dismissed due to his more visible work to forge an independent political identity of that same public. The difficult task of achieving legitimation internationally, while retaining the anti-colonial resistance ethic that has largely constituted Trinidad's nationalist narrative, can be restated as the difficulty of reconciling parliamentary governance with a "Carnival culture." Williams' "Conclusion" to his quickly written *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* is revealing: this text was written just in time for Independence, to commemorate Independence Day in 1962, but it lacks the triumphant and glorious proclamations of celebration and optimism one would expect from such an occasion. Starting with a diminutive description of Trinidad as a "miniature state," Williams paradoxically states that despite this independence occasion, "a society has not been formed." This

statement is presented as an invitation to the people to "create a nation out of the discordant elements and antagonistic principles and competing faiths and rival colours" (280). Williams enjoins them to dismiss diasporic affiliations, a direct reference to the large Indian population whose cultural values are understood as an affront to the unifying Creole culture which has been chosen as Williams' national ideal.[17] Williams places the possibility of success in the people's capacity to "invest with flesh and blood the bare skeleton of their National Anthem, "Here ev'ry creed and race find an equal place,"" but admits unequivocally that, "They may fail" (284). Having already stated rather cynically in his Foreword that political activity can be a "poison" in "countries which have learned only too well the lessons of colonialism" (viii)—countries like Trinidad and Tobago—he saves his most damning judgment of his people for the end:

> … the people of Trinidad and Tobago face one overwhelming disadvantage. That is the national character, as developed and encouraged by generations of slavery and colonialism, by the harsh pressures, political, economic and social, to which they have been subjected, by the domination in theory and in fact of the metropolitan organization and the metropolitan civilization personified by the expatriate officer who ruled Trinidad and Tobago without any reference whatsoever to the wishes or opinions or needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. (283)

[17] It should be noted that this Afro-Creole ideal, although understood as "Afro" because it was practiced to some degree by a significant portion of the African-descended inhabitants of Trinidad, also risked alienating (and would later be understood as potentially alienating) members of the body politic who sought a sense of self in African diasporic traditions and in pan-African affiliation.

Williams understands Trinidad's colonial history to be incongruous with a capacity to healthy self-determination, and he goes on to specify the aspects of this poisoned "national character" as "social climbing," "individual ingratiation," "pronounced materialism" and "disastrous individualism." These "characteristics," deemed problematic for their incompatibility with Williams' goal of liberal democratic community that values, participates in, and works at its self-governance, are addressed to the entire Trinidadian population, African as well as Indian. Both groups, the largest two in the country, are presented here as equally determined by their colonial history of subservience, and equally prone to consequent failure in their civic duties. One might point out, however, that these qualities that Williams criticizes correspond with those of "reputation" in which Peter Wilson sees so much potential—the very qualities that would "pull down respectability." Williams' values align closer to the respectability pole of the spectrum, and if reputation emerges as the mode of expression and self-determination that resulted from "generations of slavery and colonialism," from being "subjected" to the "harsh pressures, political, economic and social" and from "domination," then they are the very same "crab antics," to use Wilson's term, that betray a necessary disrespect towards respectability, with its colonially derived categories of status and recognition.

Williams is most celebrated in Trinidad for his "Massa Day Done" speech, in which he asserted that slavery and subservience was over and that Trinidadians would no longer be ruled by the exploitative white man. Yet, the exhortational "Conclusion" to Trinidad and Tobago's *History* that we just examined, juxtaposed with his "Independence Day Address," reveals a pressing interest in warning the community

against what he perceives as a great danger: laziness. In the latter address, made directly to the Trinidadian people, he reminds them that "slacking on the job jeopardizes the national income," (Independence 267) echoing the assertion in his *History* that "Independence means not that they must work less, but that they must work more" (History 284). Referring to the times of forced labor, Williams states clearly that the "retribution" of "passive resistance," such as when the enslaved and indentured feigned illness or rebelliously idled, could no longer take place, and he instead insists that the people must put all their labor and effort into the unity that he seeks to achieve in his independence project, a project to which he has given the slogan "Discipline, Production, Tolerance." Taking on the tone of a stern and wise "father," Williams lectures the people on the meaning of democracy; eight consecutive sentences in the Independence address are exhortatory instructions that begin with "Democracy means…." He then proceeds to make sure the people had fully comprehended their change in status: "Remember Fellow citizens, we now have a Parliament, we no longer have the colonial assemblies, we no longer have the colonial assemblies which did not have the full rights of a Parliament of a sovereign country" (284).

In short, Williams expresses little faith in the people of Trinidad to meet the standards he has envisioned for them—the standards of actively and creatively participating in the Parliamentary democracy of which they were now members. It is clear this skepticism derives from his astute understanding of a powerful and crippling legacy of slavery, colonization, disempowerment, and domination that shaped a "character" that, as he sees it, hinders the Trinidadian people's civic tendencies. But

his insistence on the importance of hard work, exposing a suspicion that these colonized former slaves and laborers were disinclined to labor, remains disconcerting, as it echoes accusations made by plantation owners both during and after slavery, accusations meant to reinforce racial and civilizational claims to a natural hierarchy. Williams' doubt about his people's inclination to industry is so great that he redundantly reminds them in this text that they were no longer slaves with the need to rebel, a detail they arguably had little need to be told more than a century after emancipation. Clearly concerned about how the Trinidadian people would engage with autonomy after Independence, Williams' discourses, aside from "Massa Day Done," echo an all too familiar fear: Trinidadians want only to idle, party, and drink rum; they are privy to the "Carnival mentality" which is fixated on ephemeral pleasures; and they have a "materialist" character that hinders their doing the work necessary to build a liberal democratic society that would rival the best. The accompanying fear was that they might continue to be culturally divided, maintaining the ethnic divisions that they had been handed during a divide-and-conquer colonial order.

Thus, it must be observed that Williams' own role and legacy as "father of the nation," infused with his skepticism towards the people's capacity to self-determination, hardly lets go of the colonizer's patriarchal attitude, as he instructs them in the appropriate modes for political action, makes civilizational demands and paternally applies pressure. One must ask to what extent this attitude could fully take account of "the wishes or opinions or needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago," which he himself stated as a goal. Of course, in Williams' passionate quest to bring Trinidadian people into a state of autonomous political activity that would be

recognized as legitimate in the global sphere, he did not dismiss popular cultural practices, and was as invested as his forebears (such as the Beacon group) who recognized the black folk as a foundation to Trinidadian culture. However, paradoxically, the same qualities that he decries vis-a-vis citizenship echo both with prevalent criticisms of Carnival, and with Peter Wilson's concept of "reputation," and it gives a suggestive indication of the "differentiation" from both metropolitan models of governance and colonial respectability, as per Chatterjee, that Trinidadian cultural practices were already exhibiting. Williams' model was by many standards that of "respectability" as it reprised social and political values that inherited from England, and unfortunately, it was unable to see the modes of being political that the "reputation" practices could contribute, or how translative performance between the two could function (or already functioned) as a specific and organic form of postcolonial political action.

**"Ebullience and Irresponsibility"**

Among his well-known remarks about the lack of history and creativity in the Caribbean, Trinidad-born writer and future Nobel Prize winner V.S. Naipaul echoes Williams' sentiment that individualism dangerously trumped community in Trinidad, in his remarks in an early travel text, *The Middle Passage,* commissioned by Williams himself : "Everyone was an individual, fighting for his place in the community. Yet there was no community." (43) Like Williams, the writer sees this lack of shared political consciousness and solidarity as an outcome of a colonial history: "Again and again one comes back to the main, degrading fact of the colonial society; it never

required efficiency, it never required quality, and these things, because unrequired, became undesirable" (58). Ready always with his unrestrained (and often unwelcome) critiques of Trinidadian society's apparent difficulty at becoming more self-sufficient, more creative, and more conscious of its condition, he observes, like Williams, what he identifies as a tendency to ignore the work of national development:

> So Trinidad was and remains a materialist immigrant society… unique in the West Indies in the absence of a history of enduring brutality,[18] in the absence of a history… All this has combined to give it its special character, its ebullience and irresponsibility. And more: a tolerance which is more than tolerance; an indifference to virtue as well as to vice. The Land of the Calypso is not a copy-writer's phrase. It is one side of the truth, and it was this gaiety, so inexplicable to the tourist who sees the shacks of Shanty Town and the corbeaux patrolling the modern highway, and inexplicable to me who had remembered it as the land of failures, which now, on my return, assaulted me." (54)

This particular passage from Naipaul's text is valuable in the way it connects a perceived "irresponsibility"—Williams' own fear about Trinidadian "character"—in his observations of "ebullience," of "gaiety," and more specifically, of Calypso. "Ebullience and irresponsibility" are descriptions of a cultural tendency that is meant negatively by this emigrant Trinidadian writer, known to be thoroughly convinced by

[18] Here, Naipaul is referring to the relatively short period of slavery in Trinidad. The island had remained, during most of the period when it was controlled by the Spanish crown, unsettled and undeveloped by Europeans, and did not become an agricultural plantation economy employing slave labor until the cedula of population in 1763 which encouraged settlers to move there. Emancipation came less than a century later, in 1838.

the efficacy of metropolitan society and of its values, and who would have postcolonial society take the very same form. Through the negatively presented charges such as the "indifference to vice" and labels such as "the land of failures," and despite his perplexity at an "inexplicable" lack of seriousness—seriousness that Williams also demands, and that the "Shanty Town" presumably needs—Naipaul still recognizes a perplexing sparkle that paradoxically coexists with seeming political, social, economic, (and perhaps, for Naipaul, cultural) failures. The reference to Calypso, then, for which Naipaul admits a rare admiration at other moments, expands: "This sophisticated playacting is part of the Trinidad taste for fantasy, already noted, which finds its full bacchanalian expression on the two days of Carnival." (84)

Naipaul subtly but quite directly connects the political history and condition of Trinidadians with their "Carnival" culture, the same culture that betrays a perceived tendency to "idleness" and "indifference" that so worries political leaders. For such leaders as Eric Williams, democratic participation according to the Parliamentary model of independent rule requires a transformation of this "character" into a more recognizably responsible kind of political action. Yet, what we see emerging in Naipaul's critiques, and what is suppressed in Williams' speeches, which must be diplomatic about his constituents' "culture," is how this terrible political inactivity either produces or is coincident with a "playacting" that is nonetheless "ebullient," and how it apparently echoes "fantasy," a characteristic which Naipaul repeatedly associates with a desire to be American. That the unique source of energy, imagination, and thus potential, in this account, is also the locus of irresponsibility, as it is perceived by both Naipaul and Williams, is where the unique and valuable

condition of "playacting," even if seen merely as "fantasy," explains more than just the masquerade and parading of Carnival. It describes the mode of acting politically that was the result of a history without formal self-determination, but a sure tradition of discreetly putting on the masks needed for survival and self-actualization, despite the condition of colonial domination.

**"The Carnival mentality come "new""**

Derek Walcott, an unlikely discussant in this brutal critique of Trinidadian "character" and incapacity to autonomy, becomes a surprising interlocutor here for how observations that he shares with his peer writer, Naipaul, lead to distinct interpretations. Walcott, the only other Nobel Prize winning author to have called Trinidad home, acknowledges the discursive weight of Naipaul's critiques, but he takes the latter's begrudging observation of Trinidadian "expression" in another direction:

> More significant… is the attitude to such a prolixity of creative will that is jeered at as the "Carnival mentality." The carnival mentality seriously, solemnly dedicates itself to the concept of waste, of ephemera, of built-in obsolescence, but this is not the built-in obsolescence of manufacture but of art… an entire population of craftsmen and spectators compel themselves to the regeneration of perpetually making it new, and by that rhythm create a backlog of music, design, song, popular poetry which is strictly observed as the rhythm of cane harvest and cane-burning, of both industry and religion.

> The energy alone is overwhelming, and best of all, on one stage, at any moment, the simultaneity of historical legends, epochs, characters, without historical sequence or propriety is accepted as a concept. (Culture or Mimicry 55)

With his particularly poetic sensibility, Walcott has turned what appears a failure of political possibility into an extraordinary propensity for creation, and at that, he has made it "serious." Firstly, we note the echo of Naipaul's "ebullience" in Walcott's "energy," and for him Naipaul's "irresponsibility," here "waste" and "obsolescence," leads to "regeneration." The very quandary of history's absence, and the colonial teleology it is based in, is flipped so that history's absence becomes the enabling logic behind this Carnival "concept" and "simultaneity," and the teleological expectations of progress are reformulated into the recognition of a cyclical "rhythm… of both industry and religion." In direct response to the charge that history and creativity is absent, Walcott absorbs both Naipaul's infamous charges and Eric Williams' disconcerting distrust of the political possibility of the Trinidadian people. But Walcott's response is not in refutation of this charges, but in affirmation, precisely, of that lack of history. For him it is the postcolonial "simultaneity" that is unwilling to engage the teleology of independence, that narrative that ends in an absolute decolonization and whose goal might refuse "art" for the capitalist "manufacture." Walcott's reconfiguration of the goals of self-determination both exempts Trinidadians from the narrative of progress according to the standards of the modern nation state, and renders them creatively new.

Defining nation and designing its political structure was a joint venture for Trinidad's first political and cultural leaders. In the aftermath of independence, especially after the failures of the Federation[19]—a failure emerging precisely from the difficulty of defining a nation from such a plurality of member islands, quite like the plurality of Trinidad's ethnic duality—the real difficulty has been creating a form of autonomy that could use the British Parliamentary model in a form that this "fantasy"-loving people would participate in—all ethnic factions of it. From Walcott's perspective, the "play-acting" that Naipaul criticizes is far from the problem but rather suggestive of an already rehearsed mode of expression and political activity that has not been recognized as such. The association of political failure with a certain "Carnival mentality" ultimately gives way, in Walcott, to the idea that this performative expression is in the same category, and as powerful as, the form of self-determination that both Naipaul and Williams idealize. Performance, and specifically Carnival performance, becomes thus a powerful creative cultural practice that lends needed local intention to a functioning mode of independence politics.

**The Carnival Mentality in 2011**

In a resurrection of Williams paternalistic stance in opposition to idle behavior, many of Carnival's traditionalists today find themselves in a parallel but inverse position. In a canonization of the "purer" Carnival of the past, the one that presumably represents the true Trinidadian people, there is much outspoken critique of contemporary

[19] Before individual West Indian states achieved Independence, an attempt was made at a Federated Caribbean state with a central government. The particular interests of the larger states, however, eventually led to the dismantling of the Federation, barely four years after it was founded in 1958.

Carnival for its wanton revelry, consumerism, and vulgarity. The "traditional" mas', or whatever representation of it is being privileged, now carries the kind of moralistic prescription and anxiety that Williams expressed about Trinidadian's civically lacking "character."

Many of those invested in the traditional, "pure," and "true" version of Carnival are artists who, lamenting the commercialization of the festival, seek to recuperate the spiritual core of Trinidadian culture and "history" that they feel has been lost. One of the more active young artists in contemporary Trinidad, Rubadiri Victor, whose Jouvay band "Generation Lion" created the theme "Cleanse" for 2011, elaborated his theme extensively in a promotional video that narrated what seems like an epic origin story.[20] Alternating text with images of the "Cleansing Spirits" that were the characters of his narrative, the story features a "magic island," which has "become filthy" and which must be "purified" through a "Battle for the Soul of our Soul & Soul of the Republic." Below is but an excerpt of Victor's narrative:

> Invocation; And so it came to pass that upon a certain day Cleansing Spirits arrived in the Cursed and Blessed Land of Trinidad & Tobago / They arrived at Trinidad's shore to purify what had become filthy, and to recover what was lost… for the time has come to put things right, to get it right, to put away childish things, and to shape the world in the best image of what we can dream of it / it is clear that the male cleansing spirits mean business… because everything is not skin and

[20] Jouvay, short of "Jouvert," describes the dawn parade that revellers undertake to "open" Carnival in the early hours of Carnival Monday morning. Many purists cite Jouvay, presumably less commercialized than other aspects of the festival, as the part of the festivities that still retain some of its "spiritual core."

> grin. Some things require vigorous cleaning out / some things need shaking up / One time. To work. They aint have no time to waste…. The battle for the soul of your soul and the battle for the soul of the republic. / He pulls and vaults the "change" into the nation from the shore… the magic island Trinidad and Tobago has betrayed its gifts and has been overtaken by the kingdom of grime, nearly all the light of its golden age has fallen / time to set things right… with the high sweeper's first "sweep" all kinds of forces begin to fall—blight, bad-mind, bullying, back-biting, bad-talk, all forms of bassa-bassa, bobol, & all the baser forms of bacchanalishness… but there still is much to do / and he cannot do it all himself / the dread brother of the leader of the cleansing spirits calls upon you—the people—to join in the last battle for the sake of all things… and rise truth, rise courage, rise golden sun of talent from in the heart, rise the real nation built on dream—not the false nation built on slavery and spite….

Starting with an "Invocation," the solemnly grand register of an origin story is unmistakeable, even if the weapons wielded are little more than "cocoyea" brooms, soft brooms homemade from coconut fronds in the countryside in Trinidad, here elevated to symbols of authenticity and tradition. This dramatic valorization of local material accompanies the aleatory shift to vernacular from the elevated register and tone that uses standardized English, such as "Warriors for the return of the golden age… because everything is not *skin and grin*" (emphasis added). With at best experimental poetic balance and timing, and little conceptual consistency, Victor's

project is nonetheless revealing because of its investment in the idea of a historic, pure practice of Carnival and Trinidadian culture, and for its use of tradition with a full embrace of the patriarchal and hierarchical structures that it also mobilizes: all while it metaphorically uses Carnival and specifically Jouvert practice to represent the nation, the "island" [sic] of Trinidad and Tobago, it lets female spirits act only after the male ones, and the greater public can also intervene only after "leader" spirits. Thus, even while it invests in the originality of Carnival performance, the form of this act is imitative and repetitive: it reduces Carnival to simplistic symbols of hierarchical tradition relatable to a Christian (or Rastafarian) ideology that is uncritically used to describe the nation.

Reading through Victor's rather colorful narration, another parallel also becomes apparent. Eric Williams could have been resurrected in these messianic words, in the insistence on "work," on the urgency of getting to it "one time" ("right away"), and the correlation, time and again, of the urgency of this "change" for the benefit of "Trinidad and Tobago," "the republic" and "the nation." As his discourse decries the apparent contamination of whatever idea of the republic and nation that Victor subscribes to, it reveals the extent to which the anxiety of (not) fulfilling that idea has persisted from Williams through to the hortatory tone that this narration takes on. Furthermore, the epic style, which begins with an "invocation" of spirits and speaks of a great battle and war, is not without a conviction of the "greatness" that could be available to this "magic island," if only the unethical "characteristics," (echoing again, Williams scolding), had not gotten in the way and distracted from this sacred destiny. Victor, finally, directly separates what might be called the "national

character" and republican ideals—the former, including vices such as "bad-talk" and "bacchanalishness" sounds like vernacular reprisals of Williams "social climbing," and "disastrous individualism." In exchange, "truth," "courage," and "talent," or one might say, "hard work," is deemed necessary for the "real nation" even while it remains explicitly "a dream." The striving for this dream, inconsistent perhaps with reality, is precisely where the elaborate performance of golden-skinned spirits in Victor's video come in: they are the idealized but rather whimsical "players" of the part that Trinidadians, are, recognizably, being told they must play.

Rather than read as a performative space for negotiation of national political practice, the tendency to equate Carnival with Trinidad, with inherited language of the "republic" and the "nation," reverts regularly to the reification of a certain traditionalist and static idea of local values. Yet, more than fifty years after Williams, we see in Victor's tortured language a very similar struggle towards what becomes packaged as a national ideal and self-image, and resistance of the "wasteful" materiality that has become the mark of contemporary Carnival: desires for "respectability" and, inevitably, the simultaneous marks of "reputation." In both Victor's and Williams' cases, the insistence on choosing between these modes of expression misses the logics of a translative performance, which balances both systems, and in which Carnival's true postcolonial potential lies.

**Carnival as National "Tradition"**

Even while Carnival was posed in opposition to political efficacy by cultural and political leaders in Trinidad, it was simultaneously recuperated by the "coloured

middle class" as part of the nationalist movement to elevate the culture of the lower classes and repackage its creativity and originality as representative of all the Trinidadian population, as the specificity and "tradition" of the Trinidadian nation. In a sense, the institutionalization of Carnival reflects simultaneously the intentions to generate the appropriate behavior called for in Naipaul and Williams' writings, an intention that continued to be effective throughout Trinidadian political history, and the need, ironically, to assimilate within it this undesirable core of the "Trinidadian character." The result is a practice of politics and culture that is doubly imbricated and that proceeds in the pursuit of institutional norms that meet international standards for statehood and modernity, all while that Carnival vernacularity, "wastefulness," and gleeful vulgarity persistently interrupts. In the end, the performativity of this dual modernity, "learned too well from coloniality," as Williams would put it, continues to be the privileged mode through which a Trinidadian politics is put into practice.

The *Caribbean Quarterly* published a special edition on Carnival in 1956 that was meant to "catch and record both the oral tradition and the living folk art at a time when "progress" was just about to over-take it and re-model it into what it is today" (Besson ix). Furthermore, it was meant to be inspiration for a national art, directed at future generations of Trinidadian creators, "to whet the imagination of playwrights and masmen, calypsonians and raconteurs and all those 'born creoles' whose joy it is to revel in and keep alive that special quality that is unique to this place" (x). No more modest claim was made of the journal's consecration of the festival than that Carnival was "no less than the story of Trinidad" (Johnson xi). As Pamela Franco's critique of this issue has shown, however, this "first scholarly analysis of Carnival" constructed a

limited and exclusionary notion of "traditional" and "authentic" mas (26-27). Indeed, as Kim Johnson's Introduction to its re-publication would make clear, many aspects of Carnival activities and almost a century of Carnival practice did not figure in this particularly classed, raced, gendered, dehistoricized, and politically invested selection. Franco correctly notes that "the uncritical reception of the content and assertions of these articles helped to establish certain mas' characters as traditional and their performance styles as standard" (27). As Franco and others eventually point out, most attempts to recuperate and canonize Carnival before, during, and after the independence years result in limited representations of what Carnival meant. These are not only static, but stock representations participating in the inability to see in Carnival the dynamism that might illustrate the complex and critical role performance could play in balancing the competing, conflictual, but coexisting subjectivities that comprised this new political entity. In any case, this special issue did not correct Williams' and Naipaul's inability to value the "wasteful" and "irresponsible" aspects of Carnival, the "indifference to virtue and vice," as this middle class, academic recuperation also sought to purge these undesirable aspects of Carnival activity.

As Franco notes, Errol Hill's now canonical study of Carnival, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* participates in what she correctly identifies as an uncritical valorization of a single, coherent, and holistic intention of the Carnival festival. Hill's particular intention is to assemble an argument about Carnival's potential for valorization as a form of "theatre" organic to Trinidad. As Tejumola Olaniyan shows, however, despite the extensive archival research done and the compelling arguments made by Hill, the move to valorize Carnival through the

structures of culture inherited during colonization inadvertently revalorizes colonial notions of high and low culture, and ultimately misses the opportunity to analyze Carnival head-on for its own specific cultural form and value. Numerous other texts explore Carnival as an edifying and convincing argument (and example) for Trinidadian aesthetic and cultural validity. This primarily nostalgic revalorization has been successful, if its intention was to educate the Trinidadian as to the value and relevance of Carnival to the "national spirit" that is particularly marked by the representation of a lower class black male population engaged in anti-colonial resistance. Arguments, themes, and information contained in both the *Caribbean Quarterly* issue and subsequent texts recur in both popular, media, intellectual, artistic, academic and other institutional conversations about Carnival, during Carnival, and in Trinidad today—they have become part of how Carnival is (re)presented to visitors, expats, and tourists, just as they have become part of the generalized cultural knowledge of the people, forming the basis of documentaries and cultural programs on TV. Thus, the very notion of resistance has been brilliantly repackaged by the very institutions that one would normally expect to be the object of its ire.

Intellectual interventions in Carnival creation throughout Trinidad are, like Victor's, involved more in the petrified adulation of a certain "lost" practice, one that is necessarily understood as more ideal than the form dominating mas' in the present. The University of the West Indies' Carnival Arts Program's "Old Yard" presentation every year, the Canboulay reenactments that are put on in Port of Spain, and the masses of children playing "Dame Lorraine" characters in an official and sterilized "Ole Mas" parade, taking place several days before the "real" Carnival, all relegate the

value of traditional Carnival performance to the mere donning of masks and parading. This mythification, arguably valuable in the invention of a national cultural tradition, nonetheless reinforces the hegemony of a republican ideal of a nation. Critiques of the state's inconsistencies, such as rapso group 3Canal's comic production which we will analyze shortly, itself participates in neo-liberal class hierarchies because the price of its tickets limits its audience to a monied elite.

**Political Playacting**

This critique is not meant to propose another more just and appropriate form of political activity based in Carnival performance. It is meant, rather, to initiate a discussion of the ways that the performance of Carnival, concurrent with national political development, allows us to trace how, in an exploration of the "playacting," neoliberal emulations of both colonial metropolitan and American external models, we can better identify the complex, not homogeneous, sometimes contradictory, but certainly performative desires of the Trinidad public. The admiration and emulation of broader, transnational and international standards play a significant part in the desires of modernity, legitimacy, recognition (a desire locatable in the experience of coloniality) that are inseparable from nationalist desires for self-determination.

An inability or unwillingness to read political activity for the performance it incorporates, in this case an emulative mode of self-knowing and self-expression, makes it difficult to recognize the theatre behind the idealized metropolitan political structure inherited in Trinidadian politics. The insurgence of "gaiety," "ebullience" and energetic fantasy, the underlying drama, is what makes the continued practice of

the European Parliamentary form possible for this postcolonial public. In contemporary governance of Trinidad, that which succeeded Williams' storied 30-year tenure as Prime Minister, a generation of politicians who came into their roles as national leaders *during* the Independence period would reveal, with considerable less poise than Williams, the incorporation of "performance" into the everyday work of governance and political action. These performances, as we previously defined the term, translate between colonial political ideals and local social practices.

Current leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the first woman Prime Minister and an East Indian, a departure from an Afro-Trinidadian norm for this highest civil office in Trinidad, has been the subject of vicious, disappointed, and sometimes gleeful critiques that point to the discrepancies between her election promises of strong and ethical leadership unbiased by racial divisions, and what seems to be the performance of a rather despotic mode of governance and faltering grounds for authority. In an analysis of the race and gender implications of this leadership, Carole Boyce Davies notes that "rumours persist of the Prime Minister's alleged alcoholism," of "her being subject to the manipulations of men in government and business and in her personal life," and she notes the "heavy handedness of this leadership… excessive use of a police/military machinery of the state to deal with what is essentially a socio-economic problem." In short, the actions that we are allowed to see perform a certain kind of leadership, interpreted to a dangerous extreme of "governance," all while Persad-Bissessar is charged with less rigorous (read: carnival mentality) ethical practice in her non-political daily and private life—with alcoholism, manipulation by men, and even her tendency to be too generous with, and too available for, a Carnival

lifestyle. Yet seen from another perspective, Nettleford points out, ""People power" means… not only numerical majorities but cultural legitimacy in Caribbean terms. Politicians have not been slow to use such popular traditions as festivals to their own ends, as well as to minimize the marginalization of the mass of the population" (188). Whether deliberate or not, the repeated signs of "bacchanal" behavior by the Prime Minister certainly presents its government as the kind that shares the peoples' priorities.

The rapso group 3Canal engaged in comedic critique of Persad-Bissessar's administration during their Carnival 2012 show for what they called its "mamaguy" politics: the Creole word "mamaguy" signifies deceptive and insincere flattery, a kind of performance meant to win favor, in this case political favor. It should be noted that 3canal, in a tradition of Carnival political critique, was just as damning in its appraisal of the preceding administration, echoing a certain creative and intellectual elite in Trinidad of which they were part. Making spiritual and cultural "characters" of Trinidad's Prime Ministers among this cadre of creators and thinkers, from alcoholic Basdeo Panday to "evangelical" Patrick Manning, their observations highlight the fact that "proper" practice of parliamentary governance was rather uniformly interrupted in Trinidadian political life through its unpredictable leaders. These various personalities embody both a constant intention to parliamentary rigor, through their roles well known within that inherited governmental model, and an almost embarrassed but constant, and somehow still "stylish," diversion from it.

3Canal's staged and exuberant critique of the government, on the other hand, exemplary of the unofficial political discourse that traditionally plays a lively and

conspicuous part in the public realm, gives perhaps a truer sense of the importance of performance for Trinidad's participatory politics than does its elected leaders. 3Canal's presentation mentioned earlier, entitled "The Pappy Show," was an extension of the group's rapso work throughout the year and enters into a long tradition of Carnival music that takes on and gives voice to political issues, disagreements, and desires—it falls in with the "picong" of the Calypso tradition. Valuable analyses of Calypso over the years have identified it as "the critic of the status quo, in particular those at the top who are charged with navigating the ship of state [which]… brings the calypsonian performer-critic directly into the political sphere as the protector of political morality and justice (3). Without requiring its performers to have been elected to political office,[21] the calypso circumvents the Parliamentary model by giving anyone the power to enter into debate with the government, or to lend their voice to current issues. While the analysis of Calypso as politics has focused on its potential for resistance, however, the extent to which its critical form as performative duality presents a new proto-political mode for addressing questions of governance in Trinidad remains to be explored in theoretical terms. In the meantime, Calypso has become, just like 3canal's Carnival performances which are privy only to the middle-class bearers of expensive tickets to their Queens Hall productions, part of the domain of tradition, of an institutionalized and sometimes conservative performance, a

[21] It would first bear noting that, particularly in recent politics, calypsonians have not stayed out of the formal structures of government, the most relevant example being Persad-Bissessar's Minister of Multiculturalism, Winston "Gypsy" Peters. But given the relatively late advent of this bridging of the two realms of public discourse, the accumulation of formal accreditation, such as the prestigious educational backgrounds that characterized most leaders, educational backgrounds situated abroad, indicates the extent to which notions of political participation and culture were circumscribed by received notions of what the political requires, and what can be legitimate within it. Persad-Bissessar herself marks a turning point, her credentials coming more out of her political experiences within the country itself, rather than Oxbridge legitimation.

protectorate of the arbiters of "culture." One might ask how the relegation of Carnival to "wasteful idler" ethics during nationalist negotiations might be connected to Calypso's recuperation by the same political establishment later on, its rebranding as safe, well loved by senior citizens, and economically valuable as am example of the oxymoronic "resistance tradition." The claim here, of course, is not that performance in Calypso politics has ceased to be central to political practice, but that, stretching from the early moments of autonomy confronted by Eric Williams through to the present, the constitutive duality of the resistance, rebellious tradition doubled with neo-liberal consumerist values, has become even more openly practiced and the contradiction even less overtly addressed.

**To Perform**

Before entering into further analysis of specific Carnival events, I would like to review the meaning of performance that I articulated in my Introduction, and that I will be exploring here. My approach insists on thinking how any vocation to performance in the Caribbean grows out of a specific historical and material context, hence my emphasis on post/coloniality. In this case, I have chosen to focus on how performance is given meaning in the region socially, drawing on its people's own cognitive engagement with this performativity. In Trinidad, there is a common reference to a "look meh" culture, where value is taken from making a spectacle of oneself; in neighboring Guyana, a person can be accused of "pruhforming" whenever they try to show what they can do—seeking recognition of both their abilities and or achievements that they judge to be valuable within the context of their community. I

theorize from these two terms a concept of (self) exhibition that incorporates a postmodern desire for recognition into the act of "showing-off." The actor is putting her skills on display, seeking recognition from an external observer, or audience, while playing a part that she perceives as an ideal, and thus distinct from the self. This notion of performance can be connected to the colonial gaze and the fanonian alienation it engenders. However, it also shows exuberant, exaggerated, self-assured conviction in the value of one's spectacle. Even in seeking external recognition, this performance asserts its modernity all while exceeding civilizational standards to claim exceptionality. While yielding to the system of global neoliberal cooptation, and subscribing to its hierarchies, the performance that comes out of this Caribbean shows more: it proudly exhibits specificities that, even if visible, cannot be easily coopted.

In my analysis of Carnival, I note that there is both the adherence to a certain nationalist norm, knowable in its symbols, as well as the exhibition of specificity. During my field research, what I observed was a generally mundane practice. Carnival participants, looking like repetitions of each other in their sparkling bikini costumes covered with feathers and beads, followed their group, or waited on their group, drank with their group, or waited on their group, danced with their group, or again, sat around, waiting. However, sometimes there came a display that interrupted the homogeneity, where a person and her friends might suddenly stop moving with the parade, and wine more vigorously, more horizontally, or jammed up against more people at a time. Mark Lyndersay, in an insightful article about the complexities of this exchange, sees it as an increasing desire to be photographed in a specific way, "a consensual engagement between masquerader and photographer that results in images

that depict a Carnival that never really happened, save in posed slivers of time… an aggregate of cocked hips, hands lofted to the skies and ecstatic smiles." These displays generally attract spectators, in a concentration of interest that creates an interruption of the parade. Two things are happening—a) they are showing off their skill at wining, considered now a sure sign of cultural authenticity, and by extension, participation in the national project, and b) they are achieving particular recognition for performing beyond the norm. What exactly is happening in the performance is inaccessible and opaque. The special skills, particular intentions, and momentary trigger are missing, but what is clear is that a dazzling increase in energy that interrupted the otherwise mundane parade demanded recognition, and it achieved it.

**The Grammars of the Carnival Performance**

When Carnival is written about in the press, in historical accounts, or in curation into national cultural institutions the language used regularly performs an automatic translation. This translation, with its attendant mistranslations and substitutions, reveals the simultaneity of performance in not only the cultural activity that provides content for the report, but also in the language used to present it. Its grammars, it turns out, are a mechanism of flexibility, where the desired effects or the intended audience come into play, as well as the mutual desire of both writer and audience to achieve a foreignizing[22] reading experience—one that, in translation theory, privileges the

[22] The term "foreignizing" comes from theories of translation where the approach, instead of the contrasting "domesticating" alternative, attempts to maintain all the idiomatic specificities of the source language in the translated text. The result for the reader would necessarily place them in the experience of reading something that does not always bend to the conventional rules of their tongue, and ultimately provides them some window into or experience of the foreign tongue of the "original."

source language, usually emphasizing the logic and sound of a foreign tongue that is somewhat fetishized in its final product.

News reports participate in the promotion of individual Carnival performers, but also in the national project of selling tradition and authenticity as a value. Consistently, whether anticipating or summing up Carnival happenings, these articles aspire to a particular language that, in its hyperbolic engagement with cliché, reveals an exhibitive commitment to the simultaneously fantastic and recognizable: the coveted sense of a traditional and authentic culture, a category, as we saw in the Canboulay newspapers, that is coherent with British colonial values, or one that, as Belinda Edmondson's work shows, derives from external, (trans)nationalist desires. One newspaper article describing the progress of bands across the judging stage creates a bucolic scene with children and sunshine in the middle of urban Port of Spain:

> Most seemed to enjoy the sunny weather and breeze, washing away their thirst with ice-cold beers, water and sno-cones. Small children danced around their parents, wining to Bunji Garlin's "Hold Burn", Machel Montano's "Advantage", Kees Dieffenthaler's "Wotless" and Iwer George urged them to "Come to Meh." The Brian Lara Promenade made a cool haven for spectators who brought along their coolers with food and drinks, enjoying the colours of the masqueraders and TT's very own soca. Police and army and other security personnel were out in full force, but did not have to exert any undue pressure

because it was a well-behaved crowd in downtown Port-of-Spain.

(Matroo)

As per this excerpt, the "well-behaved" Trinidadians enjoyed the most innocent of celebrations that emphasized "colours," good weather, along with representative examples of national creativity in "TT's very own soca." No incoherence between this tame behavior and the usually debaucherous soca is recorded, as just the salacious implications of Iwer's singing "Come to meh" to children, or of the contradictions of the song "Wotless" (literally "worthless," a celebration of the possibility of bad behavior) and "Advantage," (a song that enjoins partiers to "jump on it, rample it, trample it" and lose control) are conspicuous within the proper English used and proper behavior being described; even naming the songs requires disjunctively adding a Creole sound into the otherwise standardized English. The conveyance of a clean, exciting, and superlative Carnival is essential to the image of a healthy and pleasant *national* festival, in the image of the nation that Williams had tried to create, the proper nation that Trinidadians also desired. Yet these same people danced and reveled in the glorification of a spirit that would be "wotless," that would "take advantage" of the resources the government made available, and that would aimlessly follow a devil lecherously beckoning them, "Come to meh."[23] Dance and song aside, it is worth wondering which of these paradoxical behaviors constituted a "performance"

[23] The "Advantage" song specifically refers to the Carnival stage that the new government had installed that year after four years during which the people had complained relentlessly about the older stage's removal. The new government seized the opportunity to win their favor and Machel's song invited the people to "take advantage" of the stage. Meanwhile, Iwer's "Come to meh" song was meant to embody the usual performance enacted by the "Jab Jab," a traditional devil masquerade.

for the Carnival spectators, and which language in the newspaper account, English or Creole, served as the mask.

In an article about the Chutney Soca Monarch competition that year, winner Rikki Jai's simultaneously naïve and noble excitement and convictions are highlighted, along with his statements which follow a gushing beauty-pageant script: "An elated Jai later said he felt honoured to be the first artiste to win the lucrative first prize. He said it was no easy battle but he did what he had to do. He said he had not yet decided what he would do with the money, but only good things would be done. He promised that it would not be wasted and that he believed in charity" (Felmine). A year later, he explained that he was taking care of his family and their future, and not wasting the money on material pleasures. An amalgam of various kinds of values, professing the belief in hard work, gratitude, and charity,[24] and the refusal to waste (with waste being a common critique of the "Carnival mentality"), reveals that this performance does not end with his choreographed song, but continues in the self-conscious, public role this singer has read into his victory, a role that has little to do with his music directly, but that connects that music indirectly to his perceived obligation to meet a certain national morality, a perspective on citizenship that echoes Williams' enjoinder to the Trinidadian people to work hard, not waste, and to curb

[24] The sanctity of this belief in charity is compounded by his claim, reported in another article, that his charity originates in his Hindu faith, but also in the later admission that his priority was his own family. If we consider how the affirmation of these values engage with Williams' demands, it is worth noting an ethno-racial determination of these terms in contemporary political debate, where the laziness Williams feared has, continuing colonial constructions, continued to be pitched against the afro-creole population, while the Indians have been represented as hardworking but stingy—themselves also lacking in the democratic generosity that would constitute a good citizen.

their individualism (hence the claim to charity).[25] Participating in the drama, the newspapers report all of his humility, gratitude, and family-mindedness, revealing no incredulity, and of course, no hint of irony. Indeed, the fixation on these civically minded "word bytes" suggests that for the newspaper, a link between Carnival cultural events and the expression of national duty is apt. However, despite the media's decision to focus on this expression of good citizenry, what was circulating more conspicuously about this event was the heated controversy in which Jai's runner-up, Ravi B, had created a ruckus upon losing, inciting his fans to throw garbage onto the stage during Jai's victory. The ideality of reports on Jai's behavior echoes sentiments conspicuous both in Eric Williams' projection of individual participation in independence, and in international fora (the kind professed by charity-giving celebrities in the United States, or by participants in international beauty pageants which Trinidadians dedicatedly follow and aspire to win. They are values that originate elsewhere (both the Williams Independence values and the international beauty-pageant values), but whose assertion have social currency in Trinidad, even while this verbal testament to a perception of appropriate value barely curbs the more "Carnivalist" bacchanalian practices, such as not only Ravi B but his easily convinced fans show, behavior that interrupts but also, paradoxically, coexists, without irony, with a more mainstream understanding of appropriate civic behavior. With Carnival being easily concurrent with democratic ideals of the nation, a surrender to its chaotic "national character" identified by Williams is also never far from the expressions of the ideal of Trinidadian success. Yet what is visible here, in text and language, is the

[25] Frugality is an interesting (and perhaps raced) value, given analyses (Daniel Miller) that show how for many Trinidadians economics is not valued as much as enjoyment.

version of events that meets the ideal, the version that is being performed verbally so as to render invisible, quite like Condé's negotiations with Creole, the aspect of the national "character" that is only selectively brought into representations of a national aesthetic.

Language that is simultaneously hyperbolic, celebratory, and excessively figurative is relatively normal in Carnival reporting. Conflict, class, or other forms of hierarchy might be avoided even when it is blatantly present, and superlatives work best. A note on a calypso competition that was planned by the Ministry of Works approvingly reports the Minister's populist paternalism: "Meanwhile, Minister of Works Jack Warner hosted dignitaries and VIPs at his tent. Food and drinks flowed in abundance. He also found the time to mix with the mammoth crowd, singing along to Ravi B and the band Karma" (Loubon, "Works"). The contradictions between the simultaneous elitism and populism exhibited by the minister who "hosted VIPs at his tent" yet gamely "found the time to mix with the mammoth crowd" and even deigned to "singing along to [chutney star] Ravi B and the band Karma" are insignificant;[26] this Minister, after all, is an almost openly corrupt international sports entrepreneur, coming from an administration that also hired a Calypsonian as a Minister, and is led by a Prime Minister who makes dutiful appearances at high visibility Carnival fetes each year. Each, significantly, embodies how such contradictions are inherent to political activity in this version of post-Independence autonomy—performance of the roles of governance go hand in hand with the "characteristic" materialism that marks

[26] The irony of this detail lies in the implication that rubbing shoulders with this wildly popular stars qualifies as spending time with "the people." Perhaps, however, the implications of this multicultural attitude, a black man spending time with East Indian chutney singers, showcases not only picture-perfect tolerance, but also his administration's "coalition" ideology.

Trinidadian cultural practice.[27] We cannot say how contemporary governance would appear to the now deceased Eric Williams, but it is clear that his ideals persist, even while the dual and translative logic of performance prevails.

Finally, an article on how the "power couples" who started two of the most racially and economically exclusionary masquerade bands, the now elderly Harts and Lee Heungs, narrates a sentimental tale that canonizes and reclaims their pioneering legacy, noting the continuity between those carnivals of decades past and the contemporary standard of pretty mas'. Folded into the ideology of tradition and creativity, their "family organization" and "remarkable evolution," their work and legacy is never problematized for the class privilege it represents, or the dystopic divisions of color hierarchies to which their decades of cultural and social influence contributed (Khan). Rather, in lauding their contributions to the most symbolic national cultural event, their industry is as much a source of pride as are their contributions to a materialist all-inclusive band culture. In two reports (among many others) on Soca artistes who competed for the 2011 Soca Monarch title, foregrounded were those lyrics that supposedly drew on "ole mas'" traditions, and the artists themselves were praised or valorized for their achievements as competitive and driven individuals—the very bacchanalian content of their lyrics does not appear as a contradiction with these ideals (Loubon, "Talpree"; Dixon). This contradiction is the now everyday and normalized logic of performance.

[27] The nationalizing projects in the first half of the twentieth century featured a valorization of folk "arts" and folk culture, down to the very facts of folk existence and yard culture as the authentic and traditional core of Trinidadian identity. Thus, claims to legitimacy have been made in these terms, even if they ambivalently straddle the ambition to a much more lush and extravagant lifestyle.

**Carnival Grammars in Translation**

The discourse of news and history, dramatically distanced from the everyday language of social interaction, from the Creole rhythm and semantics of playful and performative verbosity, showcases its translatedness, if not its translativeness, when unavoidable creolisms and vulgarities must be included. From article announcing Rikki Jai's win of the Chutney Soca Monarch competition, consider the stilted language that accompanies the other pleasantries: "Rounding off the top five was Hunter (Lalchan Babwah) who was entertaining with his rendition, Your Tanty's Man. Hunter even brought out his "tanty's man" who gyrated all around the stage to the crowd's amusement" (Felmine). This writer uses quotation marks with the Creole "tanty," a word apparently discomfiting for not being "proper" English,[28] but unavoidable to the account. He takes the sterilization further by transforming "wining" into the English word "gyrating," even while the Creole "wining" is perhaps the most common word Trinidadians hear during Carnival season. A few sentences before, the grammatical discomfort is even more pronounced with the announcement of the runner-up's song: "I Cannot Come when I Drink my Liquor." That an apparently popular song should have such an ungraceful title is easily explained: the name of the song is actually "Ah Cya Come When A Drink Meh Rum," a Creole phrase that the editors of this paper felt compelled to translate. So anathema is this vernacularity that the word "Rum," certainly correct English, was perhaps too improperly local, and needed to be generalized into the more universal term "Liquor," for, perhaps, an

[28] I choose to use "proper" here instead of the usual "standard" because the former conveys not only grammatical and linguistic correctness, but also the civilizational "propriety" that is implied in the choice to employ (and learn) standardized English in Trinidad.

imaginary non-creole European or American audience. No surprise, then, that "Tanty's man," also awkward with its juxtaposed consonants, turns out to also be a translation of "Tantyman," a word that is not only incorrectly spelled by the standards of "proper" English, but incorporates too much excess meaning in the inadmissible double entendre that the correctly punctuated "Tanty's" excises: tantyman can mean (literally) an older woman's lover and, idiomatically and the true intention of this song, a gay man.[29] The very function of this double entendre, a well-documented mechanism of calypso music, hides the more salacious meaning of the calypsonian's vocabulary behind a thinly veiled cover-up—in this case, the idea of an aunt having a boyfriend really covers up the discussion of man acting like a "tanty," effeminately. This word becomes triply performative when the news editor transforms the already masquerading term into one that masks the wordplay in a deadpan exhibition of properness. What becomes increasingly clear is that, both in the attempts to excise these vernacular, and simultaneously vulgar and queer moments, as well as in the failure to properly do so—a failure unavoidable because the reading public would already be *au courant* to the real term, song title, and Creole-English doubleness—the enactment of a smooth and proper language and intention (of portraying hardworking, creative citizens) is perpetually repeated in the easy translation that ultimately amounts

[29] "Tantyman" is a derogatory term used in the Caribbean to designate a gay or effeminate man. The highly homophobic video made for this song, very popular that year, illustrates the continued denigration of queerness in mainstream culture in Trinidad as well as the Caribbean more broadly. The song lyrics and video, which relies on exaggerated and clichéd gender roles of men liking "cigarettes and rum" and women occupied with laundry and other household chores demonstrates the title character flipping these roles by doing "women's activities." Such a representation actually signals the growing visibility of queer figures in the region, and the resulting anxiety it generates around masculinity. It renders queerness a spectacle in need of finger-pointing and explanation ("Tha' is yuh tantyman"), but is still not explicit, thanks to the double entendre, and so queerness is both acknowledged and checked, its marginal status incorporated as aberration.

to an unabashed performance that momentarily effaces the Creole. In the usual translative vocation to invisibility, in which the process of translation is made to disappear behind the transformation it has produced, the invisibility also gives a certain power to translators who choose which version they want to show. This is reproduced in this performance, in the formula in which that power allows for the heterolingual coexistence of both "original" and "erasure." As newspapers translate but are unable to erase their translation process, with the "original" being popular knowledge, they paradoxically make visible this ongoing masking and demasking process.

The language and quixotic "translations" inherent in Carnival news have been evacuated of social realities but give discursive space to the reproduction of a certain notion of national cultural practice. This structure that can been read in parallel to the "Dan is the man in the van" epistemology lampooned by calypsonian Mighty Sparrow in 1963. Sparrow's song critiques the incongruous and alienating language of colonial English grammar books that taught apparent nonsense in their pedagogy of the English language. As long as the books' texts fit the grammatical, civilizational, "English" standard, it paid little attention to conveying relevant and credible information, or to expressing experiences that were meaningful for its Caribbean audience. Instead, like the rhetorical flourishes of this journalism, such language reproduces recognizable formulas that equate pleasure with reading and writing in a certain performative repetition (the expressions Sparrow critiqued were often from nursery rhymes), which binds achievement to reproducing a learned formula based in "proper" English.

Yet, even in Sparrow's serious critique of colonial education, the pleasure he takes in his accented rendition of nonsensical grammar-book sentences is part of the lyrical and rhythmic appeal of his song. Mixing up rhymes and adding to it the irreverence that Creole linguistic practice brings to standardized English, Sparrow sings:

> And wey dey teach yuh? / Dey teach mih: pussy has finished his work long ago an' now he resting an' ting./ Soloman a Gundy was born on a Monday, de ass in de lion skin. / Winkin, Blinkin and Nod, sail off in a wooden sloop, / De 'gouti lose he tail an' de alligator fighting, to make monkey-liver soup!/ An' Dan, is the man, in the van!/… De poems an' de lessons dey write an' send from England / Impress me dey were trying to cultivate comedians! / Comic books made more sense: you know it's fictitious, without pretence…./ They want to keep me down indeed, / dey try dey best, but didn' succeed / You see, mih head was dunce an' up to now ah cyar read! /… Dey beat me like a dog to learn dat in school, / If me head was bright ah woulda be a dahm fool!

The sentence about "pussy" working quickly disintegrates into the typical Trinidadian "resting and ting," while a local animal, "de 'gouti" 'agouti' makes its way into the story of the alligator fighting, and "monkey-liver" soup sounds a little more apt to the unlikely callaloo concoctions that are typical to Trinidadian cuisine. In performatively enacting his inability to maintain the colonial standards for proper English language, Sparrow exhibits rather his linguistic prowess that comes out of a facility with creolizing language, a calypsonian irreverence that he exhibits as his "uncultivated"

Trinidadian instinct. Unlike the newspapers identified above, Sparrow's discourse, although translative, does not attempt to "translate" by erasing the manifest difference and consequently the structures of dominance that are inherent in the commerce between languages. Creole, in this anti-colonial calypso complaint, serves as a serious means to contestation, to community consolidation, and to the reversal of the inherited ideas underlying domination. The possibility for a "comedian's" justice, which colonial inconsistencies inadvertently created too well, lies in the ability to dismiss "pretense" by forcing the colonial language to confront its Creole match.

Pretense however, reformulated as performance, is an inheritance of the colonial that has not been banished by comedy. Appropriated instead by the newly independent nation, the wholehearted juxtaposition of Creole with the standardized English mirror ceases to function as a way of inverting domination by standardized English; instead, the now autonomous people have gained control over the well-loved masquerade that is, finally, entirely theirs. The use of English, and its negotiation of Creole, of which the newspapers show one version, and of which the music of Carnival shows another, alternates between the adoption of a Creole or of a "proper" façade. At stake now, more than the need for autonomy, is the need to defend and define it within a larger world.

The Carnival desire for international visibility can be read as the denial of the organic and authentically local, or it can be seen as reversal. Not docilely imitative, the performativity of post-independence autonomy is able to balance the roles learned throughout Trinidad's history—those of rebellion, resistance, irresponsibility, materialism, and individualism—with an ambition to recognition for its

exceptionalism. This performativity, which can be one, or other, or all of these things, becomes a postcolonial cultural strategy, the very form of local creativity. The incongruous but self-satisfied exhibition—unabashedly playing all contradicting parts at once—is precisely the "incorrect" but entirely natural grammar that the Trinidadian has developed to account for the inescapable "colonial" term in this new, localized, "postcolonial" condition.

Linguistic performance, I have already suggested, is a fundamental aspect of the Carnival experience. My analysis of news media indicates that this performativity can express itself in two ways: firstly, it might be an excess of language in relation to an event, a use of speech or discourse to aggrandize or animate events that in actuality may contradict the narrative ascribed it; secondly, it might be a repackaging of Creole discourse into the forms that would meet assumed universal standards of language. The performance, on the other hand, becomes naturalized to this experience of cultural and linguistic production: Trinidadians are practiced at managing the contradiction and expression of opposing values through performance, a performance that itself might be the most original aspect of this (post)colonial contradiction. In each case, the impulse to visibility is being negotiated, and ever present is the self-conscious management of how one appears or acts before another, or under another's inescapable standard. The normative language, despite its insufficiency to the material being reported, serves ironically to make creole(ness) visible, to make it visible in comparison, and to make it visible as immanent and inevitable.

**Neoliberal Carnival**

The state of Trinidad and Tobago officially manages the Carnival festival, deciding the route masqueraders may take, the locations and prizes for each competition, the organization of bands, the rights of artisanal costume-makers, and the out-sourcing of costumes. It advertises the various events, sponsors scholarly and commercial research into it, and provides venues for practicing it both according to contemporary consumerist practices and according to the the historical charged "traditional" costumes and musical forms. The state's immediate interests fit well with global neoliberal values, where the nation's desire for international legitimation converges with the demands of a tourist industry—demands that performers of culture not only perform well, but differently, thus attracting tourists seeking newness and difference. Yet, the need to perform for a tourist consumer is not entirely about the classic foreigner, but also for the transnationally-situated migrant Trinidadian and, more broadly, pan-Caribbean tourist. That is, the desire for recognition abroad is not reducible to an externalizing desire for recognition, or a contemporary form of neo-colonial alienation, but is as much about the reinforcement of local values and specificity, the content that engenders national pride both in the exilic Trinidadians and, concurrently, his close cousin seeking to be seen even from his tiny island. The subsequent analyses of Carnival music and their lyrics will explore how the contemporary Carnival continues to engage in the dualities resisted by Williams and those of the Independence nationalism, but does so in an updated engagement with a range of loyalties, conformities, and rebellion that range further than the liberal state and its former "mother" country.

**Nationally "Wotless"**

The song "Wotless," winner of the 2011 Soca Monarch Groovy Competition, was sung by a band for whom the lead is what Trinidadians call a "red" man: light-skinned but with some African ancestry. "KES the band," named for its lead singer Kees Dieffenthaler, features an unusually light-skinned group of performers, of whom two are the lead singer's brothers, and the last is an East Indian man. Kees himself wears long dread locks. In a genre and context usually dominated by Afro-creole performers, this band presents a series of non-normative differences that would usually mark it for marginalization. Yet, KES became one of the most popular bands during 2011 and subsequent Carnival seasons. Part of the reason for this, I propose, is that its song "Wotless" can easily be located within a conformist nationalist logic, even while it incorporates those specifically carnival elements of the problematic "national character" that, ultimately, are inherent to conceptualizing Trinidadian self-determination and winning over the Trinidadian public.

The lyrics of "Wotless" are the following:

> Ah wotless! / Ah wotless!
>
> Right now I just wotless / Right now I just wotless / Right now I just wotless / Right now I just wotless
>
> Ah wotless!
>
> Ah wining away, / Feeling so nice, / So nice, so nice, / Sweat dripping on meh, / But its alright, / alright, alright!
>
> And ah feel like / Ah just win a million dollars! / Everybody watching meh, / wearing a million colours

You wanna talk? / Talk bout this / Cause When ah wine, / You go talk bout dat / When ah getting on you go, / Talk bout dis / Call yuh friends and den, / Talk bout dat / Down south dey go, / Talk bout dis / Up town dey done, / Talk bout dat

YOU! / I don't care what yuh say

Cuz, right now I just wotless / And I don't really care less / Meh gyulfriend she go get vex / Meh family go send text / But I don't care ah wotless / Dey say ah moving breathless / But I don't really care less, / Dis year ah moving fearless

Tell dem call meh name / I go take de blame / Tell dem call meh name / I go take de blame

Right now I just wotless / Right now I just, watch me nah! / Right now I just wotless / Right now I just, check me nah! / Right now I just, hear meh nah! / Right now I just wotless / Right now I just, watch meh nah! / Right now I just wotless / Right now I just, check meh nah! / Right now I just,

Ah wotless!

Ah waving away, feeling so light, / So light, so light, / Sun beating on meh, / But it's alright, / Alright, alright,

Cause ah feel like / if ah just win a million dollars / Jumping up and down de street / Wearing Caribbean colours

Dey wanna talk, talk bout this / And when ah wine they go, talk bout dat / When ah rough it up dey go, talk bout dis / Run tell somebody,

talk bout dat/ Facebook, dey done talk bout dis / De media done talk bout dat

You / I don't care what you say

The nationalist behind this song is first visible in "the Caribbean colours" the song invokes, which is adjusted from the "million colours," in its first refrain, making no mistake in linking Caribbean to a multicoloured, multicultural reputation as well as multicultural unity that it continues to claim even as, 51 years after Williams' independence address, it struggles to implement it successfully.[30] Wotless also is careful to do its national reaffirmation work by invoking a range of geographical and cultural areas of Trinidad, in particular, "in South" and "up town." This is part and parcel of the affective trigger aimed at the audience coming from these regions, a common tactic of tapping into identificatory pride that is broadly exploited during Carnival: soca artistes at fetes almost invariably, at some moment, call out the names of different Caribbean countries and different Trinidadian regions so that the audience members can, individually but in entirety, feel themselves seen and recognized by the performer and the other people in the crowd.

The word "wotless," which is a Creole adaptation of the word "worthless," emphasizes in its quick and shortened pronunciation of "worth" the scorn that the speaker feels for the "worthless" person. "Wotless" is all about being *not* "hardworking": "win[ning] a million dollars" is the reason for "feeling so nice," but it

[30] There has been widespread criticism of the new "multiculturalism" policy of the current COP government, which, in its own status as a coalition party, seeks to formalize a policy towards recognizing the various cultural and racial specificities of the Trinidadian people. Some of the criticism points out that Trinidad is de facto multicultural, and other protests suggest that in opposition to the competing model of creoleness, multiculturalism perpetuates divisions between groups by reinforcing their specificities.

comes as an automatic reward and in opposition to the rewards of hard work that marks Eric Williams' notions of citizenship. Unlike Rikki Jai's profession of the value of his family, here family becomes the lodestone, the source of judgment, restriction, and anxiety. The singer's "girlfriend… go get vex" ("girlfriend will get angry") and "famahly go send text" ("family will send text messages") but the singer rejects this anxiety by reclaiming his wotlessness: "I don't care." Being "wotless" is about disregarding precisely the kinds of traditional values that "family" demands, in reclamation of the possibility of a freedom that, like Monchoachi's interpretation of modernity's "liberty," is one that works precisely in opposition to the greater community. Rejecting the continued pressure to work hard, to perform according to a certain social and familial standard, this song points to the limits of the version of "autonomy" that is bound up in liberal ideas of worth and achievement. Such standards are experienced as an almost physical restriction, curbing the sexuality of the dance that the "wotless" performer enacts ("moving fearless" and "when ah wine"), restoring the chains that are the very antithesis of "freedom." However, if we explore go further in exploring how this release recalls Monchoachi's notion of "freedom," we see how the song reinscribes familial and social restrictions as the condition of his enjoying his freedom, just as alienation must be present for true liberty to be possible in Monchoachi. Thus, even while Rikki Jai offers the opposite of this discourse with his speeches about frugality and family, his winning song, "White Oak and Water" is actually about drinking, it brazenly promotes the rum manufacturer "White Oak," and speaks of drinking as a worthy substitute for a daughter's dowry and for the security of money: the whole is saturated with "materialism" and

"irresponsibility," the opposite values of the "family values" he professes (or performs) off the stage.

In the lyrics of KES' song, being "wotless" is immediately connected to visibility: "Everybody watching meh." Being watched also draws attention to visual emphases in the song, starting with the "million colours," later "Caribbean colours," which itself is something that is specific to and exhibitive of the Caribbean—bad, "colourful" behavior. Caribbean behavior thus becomes conspicuous, to whatever outsider it might be, as both the unified multicoloredness of Williams but also the colourful "wotless" behavior. It is also worth noting Kees' own background here: not quite black, and thus not of the stereotype that Williams indirectly reproduces of "lazy black man," but mixed and wearing dreads. "Wotless" behavior has thus been extrapolated outside of a raced, colonial stereotype, and becomes a representative, reclaimed *value* rather than the questionable "character" of all Trinidadian people. In the move to an exhibitive Caribbeanness, addressing broadly an audience that is both global and local, the racial markings of specificities within Trinidadianness give way to a "character" that claims both sides of that nationality, both the idealized and also the inconvenient and unsightly aspects of it. What brings it all together, at least in this performative manifestation, is its exhibitive intention, its ability to consolidate both the "wotless" and the "million colours" in a visible bid to enter that creole community from which this "white-boy band" had been excluded for years.[31]

Among the challenges being thrown out by KES, in the rapid and aggressive lines "Hear meh… watch meh… check meh, nah," the invitation to stare renders the

[31] Kees, in an interview, affirms that before the band's notoriety beginning in the 2010 and 2011 Carnival seasons, they were excluded because of their whiteness.

entire Caribbean experience one of making oneself conspicuous through "inappropriate" behavior, of creating an entire spectacle of oneself. The rebellious is incorporated as an essential aspect of national culture, ironically reaffirming Williams' notion of a "national character." Yet this rebellion is largely performative because Carnival misbehavior rebels against no norm, but rather constitutes the mainstream culture. Rather, in directing the interlocutor to note the "million" and "Caribbean" colours, KES is also addresses an outside that sees the Caribbean in these reductive terms. In fact, with Trinidad from which KES sings being casually extrapolated into "Caribbean," the reality that Trinidadian specificity is hardly recognizable outside of its Caribbeanness emerges.

"The sun beating on me, / but it's alright" invokes the both proprietary and antagonistic relationship with the sun that is common in the Caribbean. Proprietary because, as far as the external observer of the Caribbean knows, the sun is representative of the region, its heat contrasting it with the cold north. The contemporary Caribbean person, as privy—thanks to the globalizing mechanisms of television, for example—to this reduction of the Caribbean to a sun-sea-sand warm-weather utopia, accepts and participates in the iconographic representation of the sun as what makes the region distinctive. Meanwhile, within the local social context, the typical light-skinned Caribbean child in this stratified society would be told to stay out of the sun so his skin does not get too dark. Kees here "don't care," he stays under the sun until he's "wearing Caribbean colours," the effect both of tanning enough to seem less white, and of taking on the multicultural glow that is part of the tourist-brochure cliché of the Caribbean. Whether enjoying or playacting, the "beating" sun is its own

punishment to the "wotless" performer, but his insistence on staying out in it also carries the determination that has to do with a certain endurance and the persistence of this logic of enjoyment, of "feeling nice." This experience, more than one of thoughtless abandonment, becomes one of conviction. There is a perceived value in this sometimes challenging (and precarious) stance, this bad behavior that could lead to unforeseeable consequences.

Precarity, we will remember from Arendtian action, is part and parcel of this declaration of freedom: that Kees "don't really care less" is not simply a matter of release, it carries the constant awareness of potential consequences, which can be dire. "They say I'm moving breathless," is not just a man pushing his body so far that collapse can be impending, it might also be the fate of the state in the continuation of the same irresponsible behavior that, in defiance of its duties, might lead it to "fail." It is daring to be irresponsible against the demands of good behavior that all traditional calls to citizenship implies, even while this behavior also contains within it a performance of what is felt and believed to be most exceptional about this nation.

KES' tune and the logic it implies carries more than the bold assertions of one man—it carries within it the expression of emotion that was shared by the entire community. The changing rhythms throughout the song, from screams releasing frustration, to sentimental ballad-like lyricism, to aggressive, truncated, and rhythmic lines, make it so that the singer and his listeners go through a range of emotion and are not limited to a certain moment, a certain event, or a certain reaction. The "talk bout" repetitions of the song makes the question of being wotless one that is deeply imbricated in the social value of speech, where the behavior that is enacted becomes

much further-reaching through this mechanism of "talking." "They gonna talk" universally applies to the "south" and "uptown" of the country, spreads and confirms the scandal being presumed in the attitude of being "wotless," then takes it even further than physical borders of the nation with "Facebook" and the "media." Yet, it is this same attribute of being made conspicuous, of the known and affirmed disconnect between behavior and expectations that creates the basis of the song, of its "feeling nice." Its high energy, rhythmic and repetitive shared pleasure in wotlessness creates the foundation of the song's validity as popular and repeatable soca music. That the population will identify with this sentiment is the tune's wager, and its wager is right, given its professional and commercial success. The incorporation of an unemotional, robot-like autotune voice in the repetitive "Right now I just wotless" lines that open and end the song incorporates an aspect of the normative, the repetitive, the homogeneous that is part even of the individual rebellion being asserted by Kees. This chorus becomes in fact a chorus of identical voices, a group of identical people ironically "following fashion"[32] in their participation in this debauchery. KES's song "Wotless," representative, perhaps, of the type of autonomy that can be expressed at the 50 year mark of Independence, is able to deftly incorporate both rebellion, desired release, and rigorous, enduring nationalism in its broader, neoliberal project to international visibility.

[32] "Follow-fashion" is a creole term used to someone who copies another person's style or choices.

**Indian/Woman Bacchanal**

In *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration between India and Trinidad*, Tejaswini Niranjana studies the symbolic instrumentalization of East Indian Trinidadian women in constructions of the nation, and shows how the stakes of national identity turns very much on the role of both the East Indian and the woman. Meanwhile, investments in a gendered modernity through women is simultaneous with protecting a contrastingly masculinized traditional culture, as per Pamela Franco's study. This modernity is elaborated in terms defined not only nationally, but transnationally through metropolitan centers of Caribbean migration in North America, England, and other Caribbean islands, sites where the music and costumes of Carnival travel after the Trinidadian manifestation preceding Lent.[33] The cultural and economic influence of Caribbean emigrants who remain connected to and influential in their homelands also applies to Trinidadian mas', as many of them return for and strongly influence Carnival in Trinidad.[34] As Edmondson puts it, "culture is not always an imposition in the ways that we understand colonial culture to be." With this in mind, it becomes necessary to properly recognize and negotiate these influences from newly developing subject positions within a more (trans)national imaginary.

In the following song by Rodney "Benjai" LeBlanc, "Trini," and its live performance at the Soca Monarch finals,[35] in 2011, the centrality of women to

[33] Notting Hill Carnival in London, Caribana in Toronto, Brooklyn and Miami Carnivals have become primary sources of revenue for Carnival entertainers, from soca and calypso singers to DJs. These other Carnivals, as well as most carnivals in different parts of the Anglophone Caribbean, take place at different times of the year and thus offer no conflict with the Trinidadian Calendar.
[34] For example, Trinidadian-American sisters Kathy and Karen Norman designed an influential Caribbean band "K2K" foregrounding "fashion" as their inspiration.
[35] March 4, 2011. Viewed on Trinidadian television.

Carnival is unavoidable, but so is the significance of these women for contemporary ideas of what Trinidadian means. In this Carnival 2011 favorite, local pride in national identity is verbalized in relation to an external observer, apparently enamored with all things and people Trinbagonian, the latter simply termed "Trini":

> Them say, ah mad and ah bad, I'm telling you,
>
> Where I from, I from Trinidad and Tobago,
>
> Ah is a trini, ah trini, ah is a trini, a trini
>
> Talk bout trini, ah trini
>
> Cause they love how trini does look, look, look, look, look
>
> And they like how trini does cook, cook, cook, cook, cook
>
> And they like to hear trini talk talk talk talk talk
>
> And they like trini woman wok wok wok wok wok wok wok wok wok wok wok wok
>
> And we make good company
>
> We does put it on the place partner,
>
> We does represent for we soca,
>
> We does send out all de strongest girls,
>
> We does represent for we soca
>
> Them say, we bad and we bad, ah telling yuh

Of interest to me here is the "them" and "they" who "talk bout" and constitute the evaluating gaze that provides Benjai's criteria for glorifying Trini traits. Trinidad, here, is described not in simply descriptive terms, but in terms of exceptionality vis-à-vis an other. "Trini" is described through comparison, as difference. The lyrics posit

the singer (also a Trini) as located elsewhere, for he must clarify "where I from: I from Trinidad and Tobago." Being "Trini" then, is not constituted through geography, and can legitimately be signified even when located out of it, in interaction with the unnamed listeners who are also outsiders. That this echoes the experience of numerous Trinidadians having migrated, touting national pride despite their new translatlantic citizenship, is not insignificant, and it is also not insignificant that local "Trinis," that Carnival season, found no issue with this externalizing refraction of their identity. Trinidadian identity, at least in popular understandings of it, is in a very tight embrace with its transatlantic image. It is particularly notable that, in this collection of "Trini" characteristics that are being valorized, the mode of valuation is nostalgic—whether inside or out of the country, the possibility of finding pleasure in the Trinidadianness, now sidestepping completely the dialectic between work, productivity, and laziness that constituted Williams' independence conflict, focuses on aspects of the culture such as food, language, and dance that might be missed both by a Trinidadian abroad as by a middle class Trinidadian alienated from the traditional aspects of Trinidadian culture thanks to their daily office-city-modernity routine.

Benjai's song is particularly interesting to me because within this exportable packaging of Trinidadian exceptionalism,  all while the slippage between "we", "I" and "Trini" suggests a generalized portrait of Trinidadians, the qualities being valorized are all attributable to women, a subtlety that becomes manifest through his backup dancers during the Soca Monarch competition performance. How Trini's "look" only echoes the oft-repeated praises of Trinidadian women's beauty, and it is primarily the woman's looks that are on display in the bikini and bead mas' costumes

that are ubiquitous during carnival. These costumes dress one cross-section of Benjai's backup dancers, whose casual choreography draws attention rather to the very multicultural range of their costumes, from Indian wear to Orisha whites to vaguely African designs to vaguely European/Spanish/generically "ethnic" outfits. I showcase my sloppy characterizations here to make the point that "multiculturalism" was the idea, and this idea was sufficient whether or not the audience could easily recognize the "multiple cultures" being shown. The female dancers were thus performing Benjai's Trini qualities of good, pleasing, colorful "looks," just as, when the lines "how Trini women wok" came on, there was in increase in wining vigor on the stage. With "cook" referencing a still traditionally female role in Trinidad, the final lines of the refrain, bringing the transnational and the women together, make perfect sense, "we does represent for we soca, we does send out all the strongest girls, we does represent for we soca." Representing for soca is symptomatic of many soca artists' conviction that soca needs to recognized internationally, thus bringing much-deserved recognition to Trinidad and the talents of its citizens,[36] all at the same time that "sending out the strongest girls" seems to be as specific as that nationalist representation will get. All at once, in this song, women are equated with the official multicultural stance on national culture through Persad-Bissessar, the woman leader whose party initiated it, while they are also instrumentalized as its pretty, sexual, and performing showpieces.

A gendered study of Carnival would have to take into consideration the disparity of numbers and forms of participation by the different sexes. Pamela Franco

[36] In a New York Times article on Machel Montano's success in 2011, the importance of promoting Trinidadian culture abroad is the primary assertion of the artist (Eligon).

shows that female subjectivity is disallowed in the nationalist determinations of Carnival meanings—and my analyses have correspondingly shown primarily male performances negotiating national identity through Carnival activity. Franco provides the groundwork for understanding women's Carnival work and play as a subtle but expressive appropriation of both Carnival and nation. Indeed, women's performance in Carnival, in their discomfitingly dominating but disavowed visibility in Carnival spaces, demands a critical reformulation of the carnival ethos. Women's assertion of their frequently excessive skin during the parade, their acquiescence to the masculinized Carnival music and dance, and their simultaneous appropriation of the Carnival space for sexualized empowerment seem to find little space in the national story of thrift, hard work, and even "unity," except when they become the background objects for Carnival performances that dress them in a range of multicultural costumes, like Benjai's and most others. Focusing on women's Carnival performance allows us to go further than "national" identity in parsing the ubiquitous ethno-racial conflict of the Trinidadian social and political context, as the globalized, modern intentions of the population at large converges in the versions of themselves, bacchanalian or ethical, that they choose to make visible on the Carnival stage.

In conjunction with the glamorous costumes, professional makeup, and sexy intention of contemporary women's mas', the dramatically grotesque and deliberately shocking—a contrast to the pleasing image of carefully selected thin and light-brown women the marketing posters show—remains part of the pretty mas' performance. Although this aesthetic manifestation of excess could easily be read as a continuation of the frightening blue devils and midnight robbers of traditional mas, the kinds of

figures who are exploited by many male calypsonians, such as Iwer George's "Come to meh" mentioned previously, the subtle forms through which women incorporate this "traditional" carnival spirit is easily dismissed. The "look meh" quality of the unchained devil translates smoothly to the vigorous wining that is unleashed on the Carnival stage by the women whose bodies flow treacherously outside their bikinis, yet the language that they have been assigned, "wok," "looks," and "cook," leaves little room for this other aspect of woman's performance to be recognized as assertive or contestatory. Rather, the "traditional" values through which they can enter into the national narrative are those that are decidedly not carnivalesque. All the rest renders them a necessary but contradictory symptom of modernity.

My last anecdote is about how the discourse of Carnival has made its mark on how people participate in it. I witnessed, in one regional Carnival, a mother jumping into a paused mas' band to scold her daughter for standing still. She started wining on her daughter, perhaps as a reminder of moves she had already taught her, perhaps as a nudge to get started—she should be performing, wining in her best form, not standing still, embarrassing her mother. Later that day in Port of Spain, I noticed a woman losing herself in excitement at seeing her daughter dancing and wining off the grand stand stage with her band, waving her Guyanese flag. This mother jumped in and tried to dance with her daughter in sheer pride and exhilaration, while the glamorously clad and meticulously choreographed daughter carefully sidestepped her mother, embarrassed at her giddy welcome. Two things emerge here: one mother Afro-Trinidadian, the other Indo-Guyanese, both seem to measure their female children's accomplishment through their ability to wear their costumes well and perform their

carnival roles, wining on the road or the stage, looking beautiful. The racial divides and disparate roles that previously mattered have here either been subsumed by the greater transnational freedom to be modern, a particularly fascinating transformation for the more recent construction of supposedly chaste Indian women.[37] With both, one a tourist with Guyanese loyalties, or the other a beautiful spectacle to other tourists, the performance of beauty and skill is somewhere on the fence between liberating self-expression and communal prescription, while generational difference no longer offers room for rebellion and transformation. Both mothers model or reprise the wining themselves, joining their daughters in enacting a symbolic practice of cultural consolidation from within the most intimate community unit—the family. Notable in this characterization is the positioning of the Afro-Caribbean pair in the marginalized "regional" Carnival (in this case, the predominantly East Indian city of Chaguanas), and the Indo-Caribbean family outside the "grand stand" stage of Port of Spain which is traditionally considered a primarily Creole space. Yet, in this also more internationally visible context, the Indo-Caribbean woman, coming in from elsewhere, nostalgically identifies this stage as a pan-Caribbean site of regional identity, echoing the slippages in "Wotless" between Trinidadian and Caribbean, and complicating our traditional understandings of the relationship between nationalism, ethnicity and race, and gender. A poor Guyanese person would have been unlikely to make this trip, gain entry to Trinidad, and buy the expensive costume, suggesting this family was either middle-class or coming from the USA. From the international framing of this

[37] See *Mobilizing India,* in which Tejaswini Niranjana historicizes the move from sexualized womanhood among Trinidadian Indian women to the construction of their chastity as a measure of control, consistent with nationalist structures based in the family and the women's role in preserving its values.

Carnival, the glamorous and multicultural relies on the middle-classization of "wotlessness" in order to perform an identity that exceeds the delegitimizing and divisive roles through which women, East Indian or Afro-Creole have been incorporated into "national" culture.

Academic work on Caribbean cultural expression sometimes relies on a representation of women by men, visible in the many writings on women in Carnival through calypso, even those performed by women and written by men, and this is very visible in the objects of analysis I have chosen. However, what needs to be pursued is a distinct international understanding of modernity delinked from the traditional forms of national identity that, in their valorization of a certain kind of disobedience that has been gendered and racialized, complicate the roles women are able to powerfully embrace. The circumscription of women's possibilities, shuttling between rebellion and inauthenticity—the former accompanied by charges of vulgarity vis-à-vis women's bodies and sexuality, and the latter rendering them secondary to the nation or destructive to it—requires women to seek empowering identity elsewhere. If perhaps the influence of a transnational Carnival has the potential to erase the persistent ethno-racial representation of essential difference between (creole) and (Indian) women, then enacting a complex performance towards a role determined, in nostalgia and idealization, from the outside, also brings the possibility of achieving a very Trinidadian ideal of self-determination that works "irresponsibly" against reductive versions of nation, ethno-racial group, or gender, and through the persistent, self-conscious, and perhaps "inauthentic" mode of performance.

**Conclusion: Performing against social death**

Daphne Brooks' *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* focuses on black subjects "translating alienation into self-actualizing performance," where "they seized on the potential of unruly performance to articulate heterogeneous identities" (3). Articulating identities is here a need that emerges from a colonial history of not only ontological, but also cultural alienation. The self-actualization of the Carnival performance, whether carrying contestatory duplicity in its excessive exhibitionism, or the conformist performance towards international standards for modern democracy, must be read in terms of a national consciousness developing in the wake of centuries of social death. The political expedience of the form that "black identity formation and self-recognition" would take, on the other hand, still requires exploration, with care to not easily slip into reading self-assertion as "liberation." As we take on the performance of Carnival and its participation in the discursive crafting of a nation that can both be perceived as legitimate and while exhibiting its specificity, I follow Brooks by noting that in subjective observations of performative statements, meaning is not found in a singular attention, but rather in "the fraught and volatile dynamic and oscillates between attending to the observers' (sometimes hidden, sometimes naked) desires, and the performer's equally complex agenda" (10). In Brooks' use of the term "dissent," disagreement is articulated outside of the moralizing expectations of a political, ethical, or social consciousness. In the Carnival-national logic, the possibility of making disobedience creatively visible, while following the moralizing ideology of modern statehood, does not disqualify one

or the other, but the performative value of both is crucial to the postcolonial Caribbean enactment of autonomy.

The Carnival performativity, traversing both the values of resistance and rebellion and the vocation of conformity through recognition, certainly enacts something like Brooks' notion of a "spectacular opacity" (8). Are the vigorous movements of wining "orchestrated," as they were for the enslaved, or are they in excess of the prescribed and commodified Carnival band experience? In Carnival, the contraction of the globe, and the immediacy of cultural hegemonic influences from the materially dominant Europe or North America, contribute to some of the multiple sites of interlocution for black Caribbean performativity. These factors disallow reading mythical and singular intentionality in Carnival expression.

Indeed, it is necessary at this point of Trinidadian history that Carnival analyses incorporate racialized histories in a nuanced rather than mythical way, not only because of the distinct histories from across the African diaspora that converge there, but also because neither the Carnival experience nor the "Creole" culture continues to be attributed solely to, and reductively figured as, a purely Afro-centric resistance narrative; the diverse subjectivities emerging out of Trinidadian political history demand a rearticulation of the primarily black nationalist symbolism under which the Carnival performance has traditionally been understood, particularly because of the imbricated political perspectives in the early twenty-first century, ones that are far from absolutely rebellious or radical. As such, the performativity that might emerge out of the historical experience of racial erasure through the social death of slavery might also be apparent in the practices of other embattled and

misrecognized races or ethnic groups, like Trinidad's rapidly creolizing East Indian population.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aching, Gerard. *Masking and Power: Carnival and Popular Culture in the Caribbean*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. Print.

ACTUS. "Attack on the Canboulay Masquers." *Trinidad Chronicle* 2 Mar. 1881. Print.

Adams, Jessica. "Introduction." *Just below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South*. Ed. Jessica Adams, Michael P Bibler, and Cecile Accilien. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007. 1–21. Print.

Anti-Casuist. "Pro-Canboulay." *Trinidad Chronicle* 31 Mar. 1881. Print.

Apter, Emily S. *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. Print.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Print.

Bakhtin, M. M. *Rabelais and his World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. Print.

Benítez Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: the Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Trans. James E Maraniss. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator." *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. Print.

Bensmaïa, Réda. "Multilingualism and National 'Character': On Abdelkebir Khatibi's 'Bilanguage.'" *Algeria in Others' Languages*. Ed. Anne-Emmanuelle Berger. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002. 162–183. Print.

Bernabé, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant. *Éloge de La Créolité. In Praise of Creoleness: Édition Bilingue Français-Anglais*. Trans. Mohamed B. Taleb-Khyar. Paris: Gallimard, 1993. Print.

Besson, Gerard A. "Foreword." *Caribbean Quarterly: Trinidad Carnival Issue*. Ed. Daniel J Crowley. Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies: Paria Publ., 1956. ix–x. Print.

Bhabha, Homi K. "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817." *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994. 102–122. Print.

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. *History of the Voice: Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. London; Port of Spain, Trinidad: New Beacon Books, 1984. Print.

---. *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean*. Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974. Print.

---. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. Print.

Brooks, Daphne. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Carruggi, Noëlle, ed. *Maryse Condé : Rébellion et Transgressions*. Paris: Karthala, 2010. Print.

Carlson, Marvin. "What Is Performance?" *The Performance Studies Reader*. Ed. Henry Bial. London; New York: Routledge, 2004. 70–75. Print.

Centre Georges Pompidou. *L'Esprit des lieux: oriflammes du vaudou haïtien*. Le Marin, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Bibliothèque publique d'information : Centre culturel Vincent Placoly : RFO, 1993. Print.

Césaire, Aimé. *Discours sur le colonialisme, suivi de : Discours sur la Négritude*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955. Print.

Chamoiseau, Patrick, and Raphaël Confiant. *Lettres créoles: tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature : Haïti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, 1635-1975*. Paris: Hatier, 1991. Print.

Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Print.

Chaudenson, Robert. *La Créolisation: Théorie, Applications, Implications*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003. Print.

Clark, VèVè A., and Cecile Daheny. "'I Have Made Peace With My Island': An Interview with Maryse Condé." *Callaloo* 38 (1989): 87–133. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Apr. 2014.

Cobham-Sander, Rhonda. "'An Enemy So Was a Compliment': Walcott, Brathwaite and the Formal Possibilities of Creole." *Interlocking Basins of a Globe: Essays on Derek Walcott*. Ed. Jean Antoine-Dunne. Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2013. 100–122. Print.

Condé, Maryse. 5 Questions Pour Île En Île. Interview by Giscard Bouchotte. *Île en île*. 2009. Web.

---. *En attendant le bonheur (Heremakhonon): roman*. Paris: R. Laffont, 1997. Print.

---. *La migration des coeurs: roman*. Paris: R. Laffont, 1995. Print.

---. *La vie sans fards*. Paris: JC Lattès, 2012. Print.

---. *Le coeur à rire et à pleurer: contes vrais de mon enfance*. Paris: R. Laffont, 1999. Print.

---. "Mode d'emploi: Comment devenir une écrivaine que l'on dit antillaise." *Nouvelles Études Francophones* 22.1 (2007): 47–51. Web. 29 Apr. 2014.

---. *Moi, Tituba sorcière: noire de Salem*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1988. Print.

---. "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer." *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000): 151–165. Web. 29 Apr. 2014.

---. *Penser la créolité*. Paris: Karthala, 1995. Print.

---. "The Role of the Writer." *World Literature Today* 67.4 (1993): 697–699. Web. 29 Apr. 2014

---. *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. Paris: Mercure de France, 2006. Print.

Condé, Maryse, and Françoise Pfaff. *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé: suivis d'une bibliographie complète*. Paris: Editions Karthala, 1993. Print.

Confiant, Raphaël. *Dictionnaire créole martiniquais-français*. Matoury, Guyane: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2007. Print.

---. *La panse du chacal*. Paris: Mercure de France, 2004. Print.

Damoison, David, and Monchoachi. *Paris Caraïbe: le voyage des sens*. Anglet: Atlantica, 2002. Print.

Davies, Carole Boyce. "SHE WANTS THE BLACK MAN POST: Constructions of Race, Sexuality and Political Leadership in Popular Culture." *Agenda* 25.4 (2011): 121–133. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the Other: Or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. Trans. Patrick Mensah. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. Print.

Dixon, Bobie-lee. "Chucky Excited over Fantastic Friday." *The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper* 22 Feb. 2011. Web. 28 May 2013.

Edmondson, Belinda. *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009. Print.

---. *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999. Print.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. "The Specter of Interdisciplinarity." *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 188–194. Print.

Eligon, John. "The Man Who's Been Taking Trinidad's Carnival on the Road." *The New York Times* 23 Mar. 2011.

Fanon, Frantz. *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Paris: Seuil, 1952. Print.

Felmine, Kevon. "Rikki Jai Takes $2m Chutney Soca Title." *The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper* 22 Feb. 2011. Web. 28 May 2013.

Franco, Pamela R. "The Invention of Traditional Mas and the Politics of Gender." *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*. Ed. Garth L Green and Philip W Scher. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. 25–47. Print.

Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994. Print.

Glissant, Edouard. *Carribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. 3rd Printing edition. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999. Print.

Glissant, Édouard. *Le discours antillais*. Paris: Seuil, 1981. Print.

---. *Poétique de la Relation*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990. Print.

Hachad, Naïma, and Valérie Loichot. "Victor Anicet: le pays-Martinique; ou, le bleu de la 'Restitution.'" *Small Axe : a Journal of Criticism* 39 (2012): 39–57. Web. 8 Mar. 2013

Hardwick, Louise. *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean*. Liverpool University Press, 2013. Print.

Hewitt, Leah. "Vérités des fictions autobiographiques." *Maryse Condé: une nomade inconvenante ; mélanges offerts à Maryse Condé*. Ed. Madeleine Cottenet-Hage and Lydie Moudileno. Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge, 2002. 163–168. Print.

Hill, Errol. *The Trinidad Carnival; Mandate for a National Theatre*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972. Print.

Hinds, David. "A Mailman to Make Government Understand: The Calypsonian (Chalkdust) as Political Opposition in the Caribbean." *Music and Politics* IV.2 (2010): 1-18. Print.

Hinz, Evelyn J. "Mimesis: The Dramatic Lineage of Auto/Biography." *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*. Ed. Marlene Kadar. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1992. 195–212. Print.

Hirsch, Edward. "Derek Walcott, The Art of Poetry No. 37." *Paris Review* Winter 1986. *Paris Review*. Web. 6 Feb. 2014.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.

Hodge, Merle. "Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty: Changing the World versus Writing Stories." *Caribbean Women Writers : Essays from the First International Conference*. Calaloux Publications ; Distributed by the University of Massachusetts Press, 1990. Print.

Johnson, Kim. "Introduction." *Caribbean Quarterly: Trinidad Carnival Issue*. Ed. Daniel J Crowley. Port of Spain, Trinidad, West Indies: Paria Publ., 1956. xi–xxii. Print.

KES the Band. *Wotless*. N.p., 2010. MP3.

Khan, Nasser. "Power Couples of T&T Mas'." *Trinidad Guardian* 20 Feb. 2011.

King, Bruce Alvin. *Derek Walcott : A Caribbean Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

Koningsbruggen, Peter van. *Trinidad Carnival: A Quest for National Identity*. London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1997. Print.

Leblanc, Rodney (Benjai). *Trini*. N.p., 2011. Web.

Lefebvre, Claire. *Creole Genesis and the Acquisition of Grammar: The Case of Haitian Creole*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.

Léotin, Georges-Henri. *Monchoachi*. Schoelcher, Martinique; Paris: Presses universitaires créoles/GEREC ; L'Harmattan, 1994. Print.

Lionnet, Françoise. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. Print.

---. *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995. Print.

Loubon, Michelle. "Talpree Hits the Stage with a Jab Jab." *The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper* 22 Feb. 2011. Web. 28 May 2013.

---. "Works 'Ole Mas' a Show Stopper." *The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper* 21 Feb. 2011. Web. 28 May 2013.

Lovelace, Earl. "Joebell and America." *A Brief Conversion and Other Stories*. Oxford: Heinemann, 1988. Print.

Lyndersay, Mark. "A Picture-Perfect Carnival." *Trinidad Guardian* 21 Feb. 2012.

Martin, Carol. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary." *TDR* 42.3 (1998): 220–235. Web. 25 Sept. 2008.

Matroo, Carol. “Carnival 2011: ‘Genesis 1 — Creation’ Drew Curious Stares.” *Trinidad and Tobago’s Newsday* 10 Mar. 2011. Web. 28 May 2013.

McKay, Melissa L. *Maryse Condé et Le Théâtre Antillais*. New York: P. Lang, 2002. Print.

Melanie J. Newton. “Returns to a Native Land: Indigeneity and Decolonization in the Anglophone Caribbean.” *Small Axe* 17.2 (2013): 108–122. Print.

Mighty Sparrow. *Dan Is the Man (in the Van)*. N.p., 2002. MP3. Quintessential.

Miller, Daniel. *Modernity, an Ethnographic Approach: Dualism and Mass Consumption in Trinidad*. Oxford; Providence, RI: Berg, 1994. Print.

Monchoachi. “Cette splendide évidence du corps...” *Lakouzémi*. Vauclin (Martinique): Lakouasos, 2007. 9–10. Print.

---. “Éloge de la servilité.” *Lakouzémi*. Vauclin (Martinique): Lakouasos, 2007. 149–170. Print.

---. *La case ou se tient la lune*. Paris: William Blake & Co., 2002. Print.

---. “Le pays nous.” *Temps Mod. Temps Modernes* 66.662-663 (2011): 122–135. Print.

---. “Mantèg.” *Cahier de poésie*. Vol. 3. Paris: Gallimard, 1980. Print.

---. “Nha Caéra, rété, habiter.” *Lakouzémi*. Vauclin (Martinique): Lakouasos, 2007. 11–28. Print.

---. *Nostrom*. Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1982. Print.

---. *Nuit gagée: suivi de, “Quelle langue parle le poète?”* Paris: Harmattan, 1992. Print.

---. Personal Interview. 13 June 2012.

---. “Preface.” *Louis des Etages, 1873-1925: itinéraire d’un homme politique martiniquais*. Paris: Karthala, 1990. 7–11. Print.

---. “Se laisser dire.” *Lakouzémi*. Vauclin (Martinique): Lakouasos, 2007. 37–44. Print.

---. “Un zhai.” *Lakouzémi*. Vauclin (Martinique): Lakouasos, 2007. 57–64. Print.

Monchoachi, and Brent Hayes Edwards. “From Mantèg.” *Chain. Translucinación 10* (2003): 132–137. Web.

Munasinghe, V. “Nationalism in Hybrid Spaces: The Production of Impurity out of Purity.” *AMERICAN ETHNOLOGIST* 29 (2002): 663–692. Print.

---. “Theorizing World Culture through the New World: East Indians and Creolization.” *AMERICAN ETHNOLOGIST* 33.4 (2006): 549–562. Print.

Naipaul, V. S. *Miguel Street*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984. Print.

---. *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies--British, French, and Dutch--in the West Indies and South America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1981. Print.

Neptune, Harvey R. *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. Print.

Nettleford, Rex. “Implications for Caribbean Development.” *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference*. Ed. John W Nunley and Judith Bettelheim. Saint Louis; Seattle: Saint Louis Art Museum ; University of Washington Press, 1988. 183–197. Print.

Ngugi wa Thiongo. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London; Portsmouth, N.H.: J. Currey ; Heinemann, 1986. Print.

Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration between India and Trinidad*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

---. *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Print.

Nunley, John W. "Masquerade Mix-up in Trinidad Carnival: Live Once, Die Forever." *Caribbean Festival Arts*. Ed. John W Nunley and Judith Bettelheim. Saint Louis; Seattle: Saint Louis Art Museum ; University of Washington Press, 1988. 185–116. Print.

Olaniyan, Tejumola. "Derek Walcott: Liminal Spaces/Substantive Histories." *Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation*. Ed. Belinda Edmondson. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999. 199–213. Print.

Olaniyan, Tejumola. *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1995. *Open WorldCat*. Web. 27 May 2013.

Pfaff, Francoise. *Conversations with Maryse Condé*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. Print.

Pfaff, Françoise. "Entretien avec Maryse Condé : de la parole au texte écrit." *L'oeuvre de Maryse Condé: à propos d'une écrivaine politiquement incorrecte : actes du Colloque sur l'oeuvre de Maryse Condé, 14-18 mars 1995*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996. 145–155. Print.

Philcox, Richard. "Traduire Maryse Condé: Un itinéraire personnel." *Maryse Condé: une nomade inconvenante ; mélanges offerts à Maryse Condé*. Ed. Madeleine Cottenet-Hage and Lydie Moudileno. Guadeloupe: Ibis Rouge, 2002. Print.

---. "Traduire 'Traversée de la mangrove.'" *L'oeuvre de Maryse Condé: à propos d'une écrivaine politiquement incorrecte : actes du Colloque sur l'oeuvre de Maryse Condé, 14-18 mars 1995*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996. 221–230. Print.

Riggio, Milla Cozart. *Carnival: Culture in Action : The Trinidad Experience*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Rosenberg, Leah. *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, and George Sand. *Les confessions de J.-J. Rousseau*. Paris : Charpentier, 1841. *Internet Archive*. Web. 23 July 2014.

Russo, Mary. "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory." *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*. Indiana University Press, 1986. 213–229. Print.

Sakai, Naoki. *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print.

Sesquin, Jérôme. *Maryse Condé: Une Voix Singulière*. France 5, 2011. Film.

Smith, Michael Garfield. *The Plural Society in the British West Indies*. University of California Press, 1974. Print.

"The Carnival Disturbances in Port-of-Spain." *Trinidad Chronicle* 2 Mar. 1881. Print.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. "Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context." *Plantation Society in the Americas* 5 (1998): 8–28. Print.

Victor, Rubadiri. *Cleanse*. YouTube, 2011. Web.

Walcott, Derek. "Drums and Colours." *The Haitian Trilogy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. 108–294. Print.

---. "Drums and Colours." *Caribbean Quarterly* 38.4 (1992): 22–135. Print.

---. "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory." *What the Twilight Says: Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. 65–84. Print.

---. "The Caribbean : Culture or Mimicry? (1974)." *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. Ed. Robert D Hamner. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993. 51–57. Print.

---. "The Muse of History." *What the Twilight Says: Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. 36–64. Print.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Orlando: Mariner Books, 2003. Print.

Williams, Eric Eustace. *History of the People of Trinidad & Tobago*. Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: PNM Pub. Co., 1962. Print.

---. "Independence Day Address." *Eric E. Williams Speaks: Essays on Colonialism and Independence*. Ed. Selwyn Reginald Cudjoe. Wellesley, Mass.; Amherst: Calaloux Publications ; Distributed by the University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. 265–269. Print.

---. "Massa Day Done." *Eric E. Williams Speaks: Essays on Colonialism and Independence*. Ed. Selwyn Reginald Cudjoe. Wellesley, Mass.; Amherst: Calaloux Publications ; Distributed by the University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. 237–264. Print.

---. "The Chaguaramas Declaration." *Eric E. Williams Speaks: Essays on Colonialism and Independence*. Ed. Selwyn Reginald Cudjoe. Wellesley, Mass.; Amherst: Calaloux Publications ; Distributed by the University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. 271–316. Print.

Wilson, Elizabeth. "Sorcières, sorcières: 'Moi, Tituba, sorcière… Noire de Salem', revision et interrogation." *L'oeuvre de Maryse Condé: à propos d'une écrivaine politiquement*

*incorrecte : actes du Colloque sur l'oeuvre de Maryse Condé, 14-18 mars 1995*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996. 105–114. Print.

Wilson, Peter J. *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973. Print.